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# DISPATCH AND SECRECY.

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## I

### THE CIRCULAR.

TEN o'clock had just struck. Standing in front of a large white marble wash-basin, Count Horace de Pringy was concluding his toilette. An old officer of the African army, Horace de Pringy had retained from his military life the habit of allowing no strange hand to interfere with this operation. Every morning he shaved himself, brushed his hair, dressed himself, and required from his servant—whom, from an old habit, he always called his orderly—no other task than that of lighting his bedroom fire at ten minutes to nine, and calling him,—no matter what he had been doing the night before—at nine o'clock precisely. In spite of his title of retired officer, the count, without being a young man, was far from an old one. He bore his forty-five years gaily, and his erect and lofty figure, his black moustache terminating in two taper points, his fine head of hair, tinged almost imperceptibly with grey, and his general bearing, which was martial, though not obtrusively so, gave him many admirers among the fair sex. The offspring of an old family, he had the *entrée* to the best drawing-rooms and clubs, and, without possessing a large fortune, he had enough to cut a good figure in society.

On this particular morning the count was nervous. He had had a quarrel the night before with his mistress, an actress at the Variétés. In order to employ his mind he had taken a hand at baccarat at the club, and, contrary to the old proverb, which holds that he who is unlucky at love is lucky at cards, he had been—to use a gambler's metaphor—"skinned." Accordingly he had gone to bed very late, had slept badly, and although when his servant, the faithful Denis, had come and called him punctually at nine o'clock, he had followed the regulation which he had himself drawn up, it did not prevent him from regretting his bed and swearing between his teeth. The pale November sun, which, filtering through the window-panes, cast multi-coloured beams into the room, did not succeed in imparting its cheerfulness to him. As the count was pulling on his house jacket and stretching out his hand to his cigar-box, Denis entered, carrying on a tray the morning's papers and letters. Pringy carelessly unfolded a few of the former, glanced at them and threw them aside without reading them. He then turned his attention to the letters, which he opened one after the other with every appearance of bad temper. Two or three circulars and a few cards remained. He took up one of the circulars at hazard, twisted it up and thrust the end into the fire to light

his cigar. The flame, as it made its way up the paper, caused it to unfold, and as he took his first puffs the count read these words, which the fire lit up and consumed letter by letter: No. 13, Rue des Chantres. DISPATCH AND SECRECY.

"Ah! it's too much, really!" he cried; "for ever this circular! Not a day passes but it is sent to me. One might think it was a practical joke that someone's playing on me."

And, with a gesture of anger, he threw the paper on the fire; but, as if fate had had a hand in the plot, the paper, as it passed rapidly through the air, became extinguished, and fell on the guard, where, continuing to unfold under the action of the heat, it exhibited the rest of the prospectus:

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"Certainly the devil's in it!" cried the count; "well, it has gone on too long already. I must see into it. Let us see what on earth these people can want with me."

He picked up the half-consumed paper, unfolded it, spread it out on the table and began to read. The prospectus enumerated with naïve cynicism the divers services which the agency offered to undertake: "Inquiries in the interests of families, information touching private affairs, judicial separations, claims on estates, etc., careful inquiries as to marriage settlements, official investigations, private information as to respectability, means, occupation; confidential missions, general information, clients and debtors found; all sorts of documents sought for. Special employés for secret surveillance from day to day, for the purpose of verifying suspicions and serving at need for the furnishing of proofs and legal evidence."

Following all these details, Messrs. Loyal-Francœur and Co., "nephew of and successor to Tricoche, No. 13, Rue des Chantres, private entrance in the Rue Chanoinesse," drew attention to the fact that, "a long experience in the law, connections with all the different departments, services rendered to all classes of society, and, above all, absolute secrecy," gave ground for hope that their offers of service would be kindly accepted.

"Then it's a regular police bureau!" said Pringy to himself with a start. "Well, they shan't find me behindhand; I'll go and see what they want with me."

He rang. Denis appeared.

"Go and get me a cab," said the count.

Denis, accustomed to obey passively, left the room without a word. Pringy carefully folded up what was left of the prospectus and put it into his pocket. He then took a turn or two up and down the room. A feeling of mistrust flashed across his mind and he stretched out his hand to grasp a small revolver lying on a what-not. This movement caused him to confront himself in the glass. He smiled with disdain.

"No," he muttered, "I should never dare to confess it to my comrades in Africa."

There was a knock at the door; it was Denis; the cab was waiting. The count went downstairs and said to the driver, before shutting the door,

"No. 13, Rue des Chantres, in the Cité."



## II.

## THE LOYAL-FRANCŒUR AGENCY.

FROM the Boulevard Haussmann, where the count lived, to the Rue des Chantres, is a good step. The driver started ill-pleased. But M. de Pringy took not the least notice of this fact. Wholly intent on the visit that he was about to make, he was endeavouring to form some kind of idea in advance of the Loyal-Francœur establishment. In order to embrace at the same time so many branches of specialities, there must be numerous offices, an army of clerks—

At last, at the end of half-an-hour, the cab crossed the Pont d'Arcole, turned along the Quai-aux-Fleurs, and pulled up opposite the Rue des Chantres which branches off from it and which it was necessary to traverse on foot. No. 13, which stands almost at the far end of the street, is a house belonging to old Paris. The entrance to it is through a carriage-gate surmounted by an escutcheon on which the coats-of-arms, having been repeatedly painted in, have given place to a paper-merchant's sign-board. This individual, whose shop is doubtless full to overflowing, has utilised every hole and corner and all the passages. The stairs are crowded with bales and packages. On the right hand, in the old offices of the house, a joiner plies his trade; on the left, a scourer exposes his stuff to dry; below, a grindery shop, a varnish store and an artificial flower-maker's work-room. Not a sign, not even a metal plate announced M. Loyal-Francœur's agency, M. de Pringy wondered for a moment whether he had not made a mistake. He took the circular from his pocket. It was certainly the place, No. 13. He determined to ask the doorkeeper for information. But it was necessary to find his lodge. After a short search he discovered it at the far end of the court-yard between the flower-maker's and the leather-merchant's. The doorkeeper, a fat woman bedecked with an enormous Madras handkerchief, was skimming a saucepan of broth placed on a stove in the middle of the lodge.

"M. Loyal's office?" asked Pringy.

"Staircase B, on the right, second floor, third door on the left, in the 'collidor,'" replied the woman, without turning her head.

The count, on whom the light began to shine, made his way to staircase B, clambered up the stone steps, arrived at the corridor and examined the doors. On the third one was nailed a copper plate with these simple words: **DISPUTED CLAIMS AND RECOVERIES.**

In spite of the modified wording, this must be the place. The count pulled the bell. The sound of deadened footsteps was heard; the door was partly opened and a wrinkled face appeared. It would have been difficult at first blush to say whether this face belonged to an individual of the masculine or feminine gender: the white, or rather sallow, complexion and the absence of beard would have inclined one to vote for the latter; but the close-cut hair and an appearance of baldness on the summit of the head favoured the former supposition.

"What do you want?" asked a squeaky voice, equally as hybrid as the face.

"M. Loyal-Francœur."

"Have you been summoned?" returned the mysterious individual, through the still half-opened door.

"Yes," said the count, at all hazards.

"Good, come in,"

The door was thrown wide open. Upon this the count had a plain view of his questioner. He was a little hump-back, serving at once as an office-boy and clerk, and who, after having gone back to his place on a very high stool facing a blackened deal desk covered with papers, signed to the count to take a seat in an arm-chair. M. de Pringy discovered that he was in a room which partook of the character of reception-room, office and ante-chamber. At the single window hung curtains of blue rep, concealing the panes, which were daubed with white. On the floor a straw carpet, worn through in several places. In the middle of the room, on a large mahogany table, were displayed law and commercial papers: the *Law*, the *Gazette*, etc., besides books and portfolios with gilt backs; on the marble chimney-piece a clock in gilt zinc and two bouquets of artificial flowers under globes; running round the room a carved walnut-wood seat. To conclude, to the right of the door, at the far end of the room, and matching the clerk's desk, a large arm-chair covered with rep similar to that of the curtains. It was to this seat, no doubt because of its elegance, that the little hump-back motioned the count, who sat down without a word. There was a silence of a few minutes, then the clerk, raising his head from his papers, inquired:

"Is it to himself that you want to speak?"

"To himself?"

"Disputed claims or private affairs?"

"Private affairs."

"Your letter?"

The count took from his pocket the half-burnt prospectus and handed it to the clerk. The latter, with a discreetness which did honour to the device of the firm, did not even look at it and slipped it into a longitudinal slit similar to the opening of a letter-box, which was placed in the wall behind him. He then pulled a bell-cord which hung at the side of the box. Pringy watched all these formalities with ever-increasing curiosity. Highly taken aback at first, he began to be interested in the adventure. After a lapse of a few minutes the far door was opened and an insinuating voice murmured:

"Have the goodness to walk in, sir."

"At last!" said the count, rising.

### III

#### IN WHICH THE COUNT AND MONSIEUR LOYAL-FRANCŒUR DO BUSINESS.

ON setting foot in the room into which it needed so many formalities to penetrate, Pringy analysed it at a glance. This sanctuary had no very striking features about it. It was a mixture of the loud taste of a middle-class drawing-room and the formal private room of a business man. A sofa and chairs in red velvet, a round table, what-nots loaded with nick-nacks of trifling value, statuettes of bronzed zinc and flowered vases of tinted glass, oleographs in enormous massive frames—everywhere showiness and absence of taste. In the midst of all this stood a large black bureau and a gigantic set of pigeon-holes reaching to the ceiling, and crammed from top to bottom with cards alphabetically arranged and held in their places with

iron rods secured by padlocks. Behind the bureau, in a leathern arm-chair, Monsieur Loyal-Francœur sat in waiting.

The individual was in keeping with the room. He was an old man with long white hair falling in ringlets about his head like a wig; reaching almost from one curl to the other, a large pair of spectacles concealed his eyebrows and eyes. He was clean-shaven and wore a very high collar, confined by a white cravat, which went three times round his neck. This was all that was to be seen of him, for the rest of his body was covered with an enormous red dressing-gown with yellow flowers. A red velvet smoking cap covered with embroidery and adorned with a large gold tassel completed his costume.

Loyal half rose from his chair, and, as the hump-back had done, motioned his visitor to be seated. The latter complied.

Loyal examined him for a minute.

"Might I ask to what circumstance I owe the honour of your visit?" he asked at length, in a high-pitched voice.

"To the desire of knowing what you yourself want with me," replied Pringy. "For several months past you have inundated me with your prospectuses."

"We certainly do send a good many out; it is the only means of drawing on us the attention of those whom we are anxious to secure as clients."

"Then you must be especially anxious to secure me, for your reminders have been almost daily. Unfortunately I'm afraid we can't do business together."

"How do you know that, monsieur le comte?"

Pringy started.

"You know me, then?" he asked.

"Not in the slightest degree, but the wrappers of our circulars being generally attached to the printed matter by the postage stamp, to keep it from slipping out, part of your address—your name and title—had adhered to the burnt paper that you handed me just now. In this way I know that I have the honour of speaking to Monsieur le comte de Pringy."

Although obviously annoyed, the count could raise no objection; he contented himself with repeating:

"Then, sir, you must only be the more certain that I have no occasion for your services. I am a retired officer, rich enough—"

"One is never rich enough," interrupted the agent.

"That is a question of ambition," returned the count drily. "For my part I find my fortune ample—"

"Even if you continue to lose at cards?"

"What! then you had me watched before writing to me?" cried the count angrily

"There, there, don't be upset, monsieur le comte," said the old man, in a conciliating tone. "No, we did not watch you, we never watch anyone, and as I have been writing to you—as you yourself say—for several months past, and was absolutely ignorant of the day of your visit, I have not been amusing myself by letting any men wear themselves out on your track just for the love of the thing. No. It happens that I have numerous clients in your club, friends, I may say, good friends, and one of them came and paid me a visit this morning and spoke to me of your bad luck last night. That is all. Chance brings strange things to pass, sometimes. Ha! ha! ha!"

And Loyal-Francœur, throwing himself back in his chair, twisted his

thumbs demurely, whilst a hearty laugh caused thirty-two white and pointed teeth to appear. Pringy felt ill at ease in the presence of this man. Although he had nothing to reproach himself with, neither in the past nor the present, although he knew no vulnerable point where he could be attacked or held, he had a vague suspicion of danger, of a trap. He who, sabre in hand, had thrown himself on Arab as on Prussian, without regard to numbers, he who had never shrunk from a duel, absurd and useless though it might have been, confessed to himself now that a strange feeling was creeping over him. He would have given much to have been gone or never to have come.

"Then," continued M. Loyal-Francœur, "it was really from pure curiosity that you took the trouble to call on me?"

"From pure curiosity; yes."

"You have no law-suit of any kind on hand? Your debtors pay well, and you have no creditors to appease? You have no trouble with any outstanding legacy—in one word, you have no need of our services? My sincere congratulations, my dear sir, and, at the same time, my unfeigned regret. I should have been happy to serve you. But what is put off is not lost. Some day the position of things may change. In that case take care of my circulars, or rather, allow me to send you one from time to time."

The count made a sign of dissent.

"You will thank me for them one of these days, you will see."

"I don't think so."

"The lion should not despise the mouse. If my habits did not forbid me to make a bet—"

Pringy interrupted him. A sudden idea had struck him. He determined to test the science of this man, whose loquacity and conceit disgusted him. He fancied that he had to deal with one of those characters who boast that their remedy is a panacea. The big box only was wanting; the costume was already complete.

"Well, then, sir, since you are so clever—"

Loyal-Francœur bowed modestly.

"The fruits of several years of labour and good connections," he remarked.

"Certainly. Well, I will take advantage of my visit to ask you for some information."

"At your service. Information, legal, commercial, private affairs, marriage—"

"Don't recite your prospectus, I have read it already, you know. It is information with regard to a marriage that I want."

"For yourself?"

"No, for one of my friends."

"In that case it will be more expensive."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Well, you see, for yourself, that is almost confidential. For a stranger, you will have to impart it at second hand; that might compromise us."

"You can set your mind at rest as to that," said Pringy smiling, and beginning to think that he had to deal with a simple imposter, whose only use was to throw dust in the eyes of fools, "I shall not say that I have my information from you."

"Your word of honour?"

"My word."

"Speak, then."

"But the terms?"

"I will let you know them before replying."

"Very well. My intimate friend, M. Paul Clairac, is to marry, in a fortnight's time, the only daughter of Colonel de Rieumes. I should like, in Paul's interest—"

"A charming fellow, by-the-bye," interrupted M. Loyal-Francœur.

"You know him?" cried the count, astonished.

"I have met him occasionally in society."

"Ah, you go into society, you?"

"Ha! ha! you say that, my dear sir, as if I was an absolute pariah. Why, certainly I go into society, from time to time; I have connections everywhere. How should I get my information?"

"Granted. Then you know Paul Clairac?"

"A charming fellow, I tell you, and with a bright future. He will have a medal this year, for certain, and collectors are looking after his pictures already; I'm sorry that I did not profit by the time when they were to be had for an old song, and a favour to him into the bargain. Well, what is done is done."

And M. Loyal-Francœur sighed.

"Paul Clairac, I was saying, is about to marry Mademoiselle de Rieumes. I should like some information—private, confidential as you say—as to this young lady."

The count looked steadily at Loyal-Francœur, as if to watch the effect which his demand had on him. He expected some evasive reply. No such thing. The inquiry agent settled his glasses on his eyes with a movement of his hand and replied with assurance:

"Nothing is easier, sir."

"You don't say so! And will it take much time?"

"Hardly ten minutes."

"Splendid! and it will cost me?"

"Two hundred francs exactly."

"He's going to tell me some cock-and-bull story," thought Pringy, taking out his purse. "He is not a charlatan. He's simply a fortune-teller. It is only that his tariff is rather higher than the somnambulists at a fair.—There sir," he continued aloud, placing ten louis on the cover of the bureau.

M. Loyal Francœur began by sweeping the gold into his pocket, then he opened a secret drawer, took out a little note-book, which he turned over, replaced it, and, with a little key which hung from his watch-chain, opened the bars which secured the portfolios placed in the pigeon-holes behind him. He selected one, ran through it, as he had done the small note-book, and returned it to its place in the pigeon-hole, which he looked at before. The count watched curiously all these proceedings, which seemed to him merely a blind to mystify fools. He had not the slightest belief in this directory of characters which the inquiry agent professed to possess and pretended to consult before his eyes.

"Well?" he asked, when the portfolio had been duly locked up; "have you found anything to satisfy me?"

"Better than I thought."

"Ha! ha! And what, may I ask?"

"If I told you a fact, you would ask for proofs. Very well, count; fact and proofs, I am going to put you in the way of possessing both, at the same time, by means of yourself, and in an unmistakable manner."

"And what are the necessary steps?"

"A little journey—of a few hours—which, in spite of the time of the year, is a pleasant task. Do you know where Charly is?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, I will tell you. You take the Eastern Railway, the Strasbourg line. At a distance of two hours from Paris is a station called Nogent l'Artaud. You get out there and take a little conveyance which crosses a pretty little suspension bridge and takes you to Charly, a charming village—"

"And, once at Charly—?"

"Once at Charly, you will ask for Madame Derousse. She is by profession a nurse, everyone knows her—"

"Very well. And what will Madame Derousse tell me?"

"Make a note of her name; you will forget it. Good. Now, having found her, ask to see the register of birth of the child which was entrusted to her five months ago, little Jean-Victor; above all, ask her who pays for the baby's keep and who is the handsome young man who interests himself in it."

The explanation of this was not far to seek. Accordingly, Pringy grew purple with rage.

"This is an infamous accusation on your part against Mademoiselle de Rieumes!" he cried.

"I! Heaven forbid! I accuse no one. I say nothing. You asked me for information. I put you in the way of procuring it. When you have seen, it will be for you to draw your own conclusions. For the matter of that, you are not obliged to make the journey. After all, it is not you that are going to be married, is it?"

"But if what you tell me is true, this girl is a terribly bad lot."

"There, there! monsieur le comte, you exaggerate. In the first place, I have said nothing. I want you to see it for yourself. And then, how many girls are married under these circumstances. 'What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve after.' It is sometimes a guarantee for the future."

The count did not listen to this philosophical consolation. He had risen and was pacing the room feverishly. A little bell at M. Loyal-Francœur's side rang twice. It was the hump-back announcing a fresh visitor. The inquiry-agent got up.

"Excuse me, monsieur le comte," said he, with an obsequiousness which was not without a touch of irony, "but if you have nothing further to ask me, I would draw your attention to the fact that other clients await me."

"Quite so," said Pringy, taking his hat, and walking towards the door.

"Excuse me once more," continued Loyal-Francœur, "you will encounter someone in that direction. One must be quite unobserved here. You know, *dispatch and secrecy!*" And lifting up the skirt of his beautiful flowered dressing-gown, M. Loyal-Francœur opened a little door concealed beneath a curtain in a corner of his room. The count hastened to enter it, whilst the inquiry-agent, making him a respectful bow, launched after him, as a kind of Parthian shaft, his last injunction:

"Charly, Madame Derousse!—don't forget the name!"

Then, when he had heard the sound of his footsteps die away in the passage, he went and opened the other door. A woman, hooded and veiled, entered.

"Who was it that was here?" she asked.

"Someone," said Loyal-Francœur, rubbing his hands, "someone who's going to bring grist to our mill."

The young woman took off her veil and fur mantle, which she threw on a chair, and sat down. She was a magnificent creature; hardly thirty. Hers was the splendid carnation of the Southern woman. The loose morning robe which enveloped it, set off her delicate and shapely figure. Her black hair, with little or no fastening, fell in coils on her shoulders. She looked steadily at Loyal-Francœur, and, in spite of his glasses, the latter cast down his eyes beneath the glance of fire.

"A fresh agent?" she asked, after a moment's silence.

"Better than that; a client; a man who is setting to work as an amateur. In two hours he will be at Charly."

"And you are not afraid of any imprudence."

The inquiry-agent laughed a dry laugh.

"It is he who is taking the step," said he, "he alone is responsible for it."

"That is true. I am satisfied as to that, but—"

She stopped. The agent waited. There was silence—

"But Pedrillo?" she resumed.

Loyal-Francœur took up a telegraphic message from his desk. This message was couched in the following terms:

"Paris, from Saint Maud, 1927—21 November, 11. 15. P.M. Loyal, 13, Rue Chantres, Paris. Have sent off goods bought; you receive carriage free.—Durand."

"Which means to say?"

"Which means to say that M. Pedrillo will trouble you no further, and that the affair has succeeded without leaving us anything to fear."

"And the papers?" asked again the young woman, growing pale.

"I have had no news as yet. But didn't you tell me that he still had them on him?"

"They never left him, not even when he slept."

"Very well, in that case the thing is done."

"Oh! free, free at last!" she cried, "rid of this burden, this fear, this dagger for ever menacing my breast. I have done what I ought to have done. Come, fate is for me!"

Drawing from her pocket a roll of bank-notes, she threw it to Loyal-Francœur.

"The rest in return for the papers," she said.

And hurriedly snatching up her mantle and hat, she rushed out like a mad woman. The agent watched her go. Then, opening his flowered dressing-gown, he drew from it a pocket-book stuffed with letters, looked at it, and began to laugh.

"It is heavy," he muttered, "but it's worth at least it's weight in bank-notes."

#### IV.

##### THE STRANGE CORPSE.

THAT evening M. Manuel, commissary of the Saint-X—district, was in his private room, putting on a white cravat as he dictated a report to his secretary. All at once three low taps were heard at the door. Almost everyone knows how the rooms in a commissary's office in Paris are



arranged. It is according to a certain order. There is firstly the common entrance-room, which is open to the public, and where are to be seen the inspectors and the clerk: oaken tables, oaken seats for the prisoners, earthenware stove. Then comes the secretary's office, the first halting-place of prosecutors and prisoners; stained oak desk, armchair, cherry-wood chairs, earthenware stove. Finally, the commissary's private room, a sanctuary which possesses, or should possess, a second exit, and where the vulgar crowd can only enter by traversing the two other rooms: more elegant furniture, mahogany desk, chairs in green velvet, bookcase, chimney-piece with mirror and clock, carpet, bell-cord always within reach. Now, as it was past six o'clock, and as the offices had been closed for the last hour, M. Manuel had every reason to be much surprised that he should be disturbed in his private room.

"Who the deuce can it be at this hour, and how is it that the orders that I gave the inspector have been infringed?" he cried, angrily. "I had given strict orders that I was not to be disturbed! I must finish my report, and I have to take my wife and daughter to the Opera, where my colleague of the Madeleine has lent me his box."

The secretary went and unbolted the door, which he half opened. The inspector thrust his head in.

"A gentleman who insists on seeing the commissary."

"You hadn't closed the office, then?"

"Yes, but he saw a light and hammered until I opened the door."

"You should have told him that he could not see me."

"He says that he—"

"Have you his name, at any rate?"

"Yes, sir; here is his card."

"I was certain of it!" cried the commissary. "Look, 'Gratien Voiville, journalist.' Another journalist who has got wind of our affair and is on the track. These fellows are beyond everything!"

"But where do they get their information from?" asked the secretary, dumbfounded.

"How do I know! They are like crows; the corpse attracts them. At any rate, this one will not have a very rich prey. It's impossible to imagine anything more commonplace."

"So commonplace that I shall give myself the pleasure of witnessing his disgust. Show the gentleman in."

The reporter, for a reporter he was, entered. He was a man of about thirty, dark, wearing a small moustache and having a hooked nose, a sharp glance, and intelligent features. He was enveloped in a great brown ulster which entirely concealed his other clothes.

"I must make a thousand apologies, M. le Commissaire," said he at once, "but you are engaged at present with a case which I consider a curious one, and, as it took place under the open sky, I think there is no reason why the details should not be made public."

"To what do you refer, sir?" asked M. Manuel, with a touch of sarcasm.

"To the body that was found this morning on the railway line."

"And you would like some information?"

"If it is agreeable to you."

"Good gracious! sir, there is no reason why it should be otherwise. It's the simplest thing in the world, a simple suicide, the simplest of suicides."

"Suicide?"

"Certainly."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

In reply, M. Manuel stretched out his hand, took up the sheet of paper on which his secretary was writing the report, and held it out to the journalist. The latter threw a rapid glance over it and replaced it on the desk.

"Then, M. le Commissaire," said he, "you and I differ."

"You don't say so," said the magistrate, in a bantering voice.

"Alas! yes. I believe, or I may say I am certain, that murder has been committed."

The decisive tone in which this was said made the commissary start. Overcoming this movement of surprise, he asked, without relinquishing his chaffing manner:

"And on what, sir, do you base this opinion?"

"On my own observations," replied the reporter, coolly.

"Would it be impertinent to ask you for an explanation?"

"Not at all, M. le Commissaire; your kindness in receiving me has been too great to allow me to refuse to enlighten you."

"Enlighten me, enlighten me, my dear sir," cried the commissary, with feigned eagerness. And he gave his secretary a knowing look, as if to hint to him not to interpose in the mystification which he was preparing for a rash journalist. The secretary winked and affected to be absorbed in his document, so as to be able to enjoy the joke at his ease.

"Now, my dear sir," said M. Manuel, "I am all attention; what important observations have you made?"

"In the first place, sir," said the reporter, without appearing to notice this by-play, "I was struck by the position of the body."

"Ah! you have seen the body?"

"I was present when you arrived, and I kept aside, so as not to be in the way. Moreover, my own observations were concluded."

"Ah! you make observations?"

"Always. It is the only way to get at the truth. All your colleagues are not as pleasant as you. Accordingly, I have been in the habit of making use of my own eyes, reserving to myself the right of modifying my conclusions later on."

"That is a wise plan. But not always an easy one."

"That depends. This morning I had only to appear on the spot. At other times it needs cunning. For the Passage Saulnier Crime I had to pass half a day with a neighbour of Maria Fellerath's. At Bobigny I was with the diggers, at the end of old Théré's garden. In the Rue Fontaine I had to go and pump six jugs of water in the yard in order to be able to examine at my ease the scene of the crime—"

"Ah!" muttered the commissary to himself. "But continue, my dear sir; you were saying that your own observations—?"

"Differ absolutely from yours," replied the journalist, casting a glance on the report. "In the first place, sir, the body was not propped against the wall; a plate-layer placed it there. When it was discovered it was lying on the left side. But that's nothing; what follows is more serious. You say that the weapon with which he killed himself has been discovered; for my part, I don't believe it."

"What! but he was still holding the discharged pistol."

"Yes, he held the weapon 'in his clenched hand,' as we say in our pars. Well M. le Commissaire, I deny it."

"Oh, come!" cried M. Manuel and his secretary in chorus, "you deny the existence of the pistol?"

"Not the pistol, certainly, since here it is," said the reporter, pointing to the weapon on the desk. "Let us understand one another. What I deny is that it caused his death."

"But—"

"And you will be of my opinion, when I have given you the reasons which make me say this."

"I ask no better; go on."

"Well, question No. 1. At what distance do you think the shot was fired?"

"Why, at half-arm's length—fifteen inches, perhaps."

"Very good. Then, how do you account for the fact that the skin is not blackened by the powder? And especially with a pistol like this, which is as large as a blunderbuss?"

"Ah! to be sure, I never thought of that," said the commissary, visibly annoyed.

"And the wound, have you compared it with the calibre of the weapon?"

"Well, what is the result of this comparison?"

"It is conclusive: the wound is clean and regular, the frontal bone is pierced by a tiny hole. But the bullet must, in rotating, have caused great havoc in the cerebral cavity."

"Ah!"

"With this pistol, on the contrary," continued the journalist, "there would be an enormous hole; the bone would be smashed, as if by some blunt instrument. I will bet any sum that at the *post mortem* it will be found that the ball is from a revolver."

"You are certainly a veritable Lecoq!" cried the commissary, half in earnest, half envious.

"And I draw my conclusions. The shot was not fired from the pistol. The man was killed by a point-blank shot from a revolver. Therefore, murder and not suicide!"

"Right, quite right," said M. Manuel, who had become thoughtful. "But are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"Examine the body with me. Where is it?"

"At the Morgue. The deuce! I'll have it looked into," cried the magistrate, ringing the bell violently. "Péraud, go and fetch me a cab," he called out to the inspector, who had hurried to the spot, quite alarmed. "And at the same time, go and tell Doctor Lardit that I want him at once; my secretary will bring him to us. Come, sir, come with me. I want to verify your observations without a moment's delay."

"And the ladies you are expecting!" objected the secretary, quite taken aback.

"Let them go to the opera alone. I have something else to do than to go and listen to Faure. *Sapristi!* if this gentleman has not been telling us some fairy-tale, I was going to make a pretty mess of things."

The inspector, Péraud, appeared, having ordered a cab. The commissary and the reporter went out by the private door and took their seats.

"To the Morgue!" said the magistrate to the driver,

The cab started off at full trot.

## V.

## TO THE MORGUE !

THE Morgue of to-day is a very different establishment from the two which preceded it. It is no longer the old vault of the Petit-Châtelet, where the bodies could only be viewed through a pane of glass ; it is no longer the old, legendary Morgue standing in the Marché-Neuf scalding-house, whose pestiferous exhalations rendered the whole neighbourhood uninhabitable.

It is a decent-looking building, clean, well-kept, and which, by a praise-worthy coquettishness, does its very best to cause its sinister purpose to be forgotten. It is not confined, as one might be tempted to believe, to the well-known room, where the bodies are exposed. This room, in fact, only forms a small part of the building. It often happens that the slabs exposed to the public are empty, whilst there are numerous corpses within. On hearing M. Manuel's ring, the attendant who sleeps at night in a little room in the right wing showed his head at the window. Recognising the magistrate, he came and opened the door.

"Ah, it's you, Arthur," said the commissary, recognising the attendant. "Where is the body of the man I sent here to-night?"

"It is in the large room, M. le Commissaire."

"Take us to it."

Arthur nodded.

"Do you wish to pass through the office?" he asked. "If so, you must wait whilst I go and open the doors which are fastened on the inside."

"No, let us go as quickly as possible," replied M. Manuel, walking towards the right-hand door.

This door is that of the amphitheatre attendants, of which there are two during the day, who take it in turns to pass the night in a little bed near their room. After having crossed this room, the three men passed through the apartment where are kept, neatly folded and ticketed, the clothing of the corpses. They passed from there to the "identified" room, and finally into the great hall, into which the vans can penetrate, and where are at first deposited the corpses, to be later on undressed, washed and searched. On one of the dozen black tables, between a young girl who had been drowned and a slater who had fallen from a scaffolding, was the body of the man found on the line. He was completely naked, with the exception of the traditional leather apron, fastened round the waist. On to his head trickled a tiny stream of water, which, running over his whole body, escaped down a grating at the far end of the room. He was a man of about forty, a fine fellow, greyish about the temples, but possessing a fine head of black hair cut military fashion. In the left temple was the clean hole, just surrounded by a small blue circle which the ball had made on entering. The reporter pointed to this hole, without saying a word. The commissary, at the first glance, was convinced.

"Yes, you are right," said he. "Where the devil were my brains? That fool of a doctor, too, misled me. It's his business and not mine to examine wounds. I should like to see what sort of a face he'll make."

Just then there was another ring at the bell.

"Ah ! here he is. We shall see what he'll say."

The attendant went and opened the door and came back with the secretary only.

"Well, where's the doctor?" asked M. Manuel impatiently.

"He was out. They told me that he would not be home till late."

"Heaven help him! *He* won't be a divisional surgeon for long."

"Well," interrupted the reporter, "you see, M. le Commissaire, my visit was not so prejudicial after all."

"Prejudicial," cried M. Manuel warmly, "prejudicial! Why, sir, Providence must have sent you! If it had not been for you, I should perhaps have mulled a splendid case—yes, splendid. It will be splendid, by heaven! if you will assist me. We must know who the victim is, and from the precautions which were taken to divert suspicion, it is worth knowing. The murderer is a clever man. No matter! we shall discover him, I'm persuaded, I'm certain."

"Unless," said the reporter coolly, "the case is taken away from you and given to the Public Prosecutor."

This remark fell like a cold shower-bath on M. Manuel's enthusiasm.

"Ah, yes," he growled, "yes, the Public Prosecutor; quite so. He takes everything; they have ten, fifteen, twenty cases all at once. As if one was not enough. And then, when he can't find anything out, slap! bang! the case is 'classified,' as they call it; that is to say, it's shoved away in a drawer and no more is heard of it. Well, that won't prevent me from making every effort, and, as I said before, if you like to lend me a hand—"

"I don't object, although it's not in my line; I made a few remarks—"

"A few remarks! Why, you have the eye of a Canler. Come along, my dear sir, come along, I have an idea; we can talk it over on the way."

They were going out, when the attendant stopped them.

"M. le Commissaire," said he, "I found something as I was undressing the man."

"In his pockets?"

"No, in the lining of his trousers. It was securely sewn in. The rustling of the paper—"

"It is a paper, then?" cried the commissary eagerly. "A paper which perhaps will give us the answer to the puzzle."

"I don't think so, for there is no writing on it. But you can look for yourself, for here it is."

The man took a small card from off the table and handed it to the magistrate. The latter, on looking at it, seemed disappointed. The card, in fact, had nothing remarkable about it; it was simply one of those pieces of cardboard such as players at roulette or trente-et-quarante use, and which serve to mark the series, either simply to make a note of past throws, or more often to work out combinations. This card, then, could only suggest one thing, that the dead man was a gambler, and in the first hypothesis of suicide, it would have supported that view. But since he had verified the reporter's statements, M. Manuel was satisfied that he had to deal with a crime. Accordingly, it was with this idea that he sought for some corroboration.

"He is a gambler," said he, "some man who has been enticed into one of those hells with which Paris swarms, and whom his companions have assassinated in order to get back the money that he had won from them."

"That is likely enough," said Voiville.

"We must make inquiries in the ranks of the gamblers. Unfortunately

in spite of police raids, we know but little about these folks. And, besides, all these fellows hang together. But this man did not look to me to belong to the upper classes. What have you done with his clothes, Arthur?"

"Here they are, M. le Commissaire; we put them on one side to be washed, like everything else that comes in here."

"Let us see. Oh! look here, M. le journaliste. Look at this! A tattered blouse, frayed trousers, shoes—hallo! brand new patent leather shoes, probably a recent purchase at the 'pop shop,' or else at old Lempereur's, Rue des Rosiers, Bohemia's bootmaker."

"Will you allow me to make one more observation, M. le commissaire?" asked Voiville.

"What! two, three, ten, if you like."

"Very well, look at the hands and feet of the corpse."

"Why?"

"Have you seen many Bohemians with nails like this?"

"*Saperlotte!* it's true what you say."

"The fact is," said Arthur, "that among our customers we don't have many swells like this; I had noticed it already, and I intended to draw the attention of the commissary to it when this gentleman forestalled me."

"Do you think, then, that this man belongs to a higher class than his clothes denote?"

"Most certainly."

"Then they have stripped him of his clothes and put on others. The corpse has been disguised?"

"That is sometimes a more certain method than cutting it in pieces. Look at this case. Looking at his wretched appearance, the first conclusion was suicide."

"That's true enough. Then we have a better chance, perhaps, establishing his identity."

"Of course."

"Excuse me," remarked the secretary, who began to be jealous of the reporter's success, "but there is another version which might be the correct one. This man may be a former aristocrat who has fallen on evil days because of losses at play, and who, in his misery, may have retained the habit of attending to his personal appearance."

"Ah! my dear fellow, don't throw cold water on my triumph," cried M. Manuel; "leave me at least the hope that we are on the right track. This gentleman, up to the present, has been quite right. We owe him too much to ignore what he says now."

The secretary, obviously vexed, was silent.

"This gentleman is right perhaps," said Voiville quickly, not wishing to make an enemy of the young man. "But, ruined or disguised, this man was a gambler, and a fashionable gambler. It is therefore in those circles, in card-rooms, clubs, at Monaco, that he must be sought."

"And we shall succeed, my friend," cried M. Manuel with enthusiasm. "From to-day we must set to work on this case and never leave it till we have captured the murderer."

"Excuse me," replied the reporter, smiling. "Unfortunately that is not all that I have to do. And, by-the-bye," he added, taking out his watch, "it's nine o'clock; I must run off to the jeweller's ball, which takes place to-night, and of which I have promised an account to my paper, and, in addition to that, I have to go to the Press Club about the account of a

duel which is to take place shortly. Till to-morrow, then, my dear sir; go on with your investigations; I will come and have another talk with you."

A cab was passing. He hailed it and drove off whilst M. Manuel and his secretary got into the cab which had brought them.

## VI.

### THAT WORTHY M. LOYAL.

WE left M. Loyal-Francœur examining the papers contained in the pocket-book. This examination appeared to please him, for, after the lapse of a moment, he rose and opened the door of the waiting-room. The little hump-backed clerk was still absorbed in his work.

"You can shut up the office and go, Isidore," said the inquiry-agent. "I have some work to do and can see no one."

The hump-back made no reply, but a smile lit up his pale face. Then he got up to obey. Satisfied that his orders would be executed, M. Loyal-Francœur returned to his room, locked the door of communication and put the key in his pocket. This done, he began again to peruse the papers. There were a great many of them, and M. Loyal-Francœur devoted a great deal of time to each, his face was beaming with joy. Suddenly the clock struck five.

"*Saperlotte!*" said the inquiry-agent, "I am forgetting myself, and I have some more business to do to-day."

He got up, walked to the sofa, mounted on it, without regard to the beautiful red leather, lifted up a picture hanging on the wall and uncovered a tiny little hole in the middle of a flower on the pattern of the paper. Into this hole he fitted a key which hung on his watch-chain. A large iron door turned on its hinges, carrying with it the picture and displaying pigeon-holes, also of iron. They contained valuables of all kinds, jewellery, weapons, papers, and on the top shelf a collection of wigs on wooden heads. M. Loyal-Francœur began by placing the precious pocket-book in the cupboard, as well as the packet of bank-notes which he had received that morning. Then he took off his white wig and his large glasses. This produced a complete metamorphosis. M. Loyal-Francœur was a man of about thirty-five or forty, with red hair, closely cut, and growing down very low over his forehead, little green eyes, always on the move, and throwing out, like those of cats, phosphorescent flashes. It was easy to see why he disguised himself, for, seen thus, he was hideous, repulsive, terrible. This only lasted for a second. M. Loyal-Francœur had taken from the cupboard a pepper-and-salt wig, much less ample than the white one, and had placed it on his head. Small, gold-rimmed spectacles replaced his goggles. He removed his dressing-gown and put on a long, well-padded frock-coat. He looked now like a simple country notary or a suburban *bourgeois* in his Sunday best. A fashionable black hat, well polished, and a large umbrella, carefully folded, completed his costume.

M. Loyal-Francœur took a final glance at himself in a looking-glass, poened the door at which he had shown the Comte de Pringy out, and stepped out into the passage. But instead of making use of the grand staircase, he walked down the passage until he came to some narrow back-stairs. This was the "private entrance in the Rue Chanoinesse." On setting foot in the street, M. Loyal-Francœur, like a prudent man, threw



a rapid glance right and left. The street was deserted, as was also, for the matter of that, the whole neighbourhood. Reassured by this cursory examination, M. Loyal-Franceur walked straight towards the Rue du Cloître-Notre-Dame, passed through the precincts and crossed the Petit-Pont. His walk was the calm and tranquil one of a peaceable citizen going to business. The Petit-Pont crossed, he amused himself for a moment by looking at the books of the stall-keepers, who were closing for the night, then he walked along the Rue Saint-Jacques until he came to the Rue des Feuillantines. There he stopped before an old tumble-down house, satisfied himself, with a final glance of suspicion, that no one was following him, and entered. He was evidently a frequent visitor to the house, for he did not halt at the porter's lodge. He crossed the first court-yard, ascended, without hesitating, a very dark staircase, and on the third floor gave three taps at the door which faced him. Shuffling steps were heard, the door opened, and an old woman, modestly but very cleanly dressed, appeared. On perceiving the visitor, she made a gesture of joyful surprise.

"M. Loyal ! how good of you to take the trouble to come and pay us a visit !"

"What trouble, my dear Madame Borin ? you ought to say pleasure. For it is really, I can assure you, a very great pleasure to leave behind for a moment the turmoil of business, to come and gather fresh strength amongst honest people like you. And, by-the-bye, how are things going on here, Madame Borin ?"

"Still very well, thanks to you, thanks to your kindness, our generous benefactor."

"There, there, you want to make me blush, by saying that on the stairs, so that all the neighbours can hear," said M. Loyal, enjoying a good-natured laugh. "You would do better to offer me a chair. Your street is so badly paved."

"Ah ! good gracious ! that's true, wherever are my wits ?" said the good woman, ushering the inquiry-agent in, and shutting the door. It was one of those modest dwellings inhabited by workmen or clerks, which are so common in that neighbourhood, and which comprise three rooms and a kitchen stowed away in a corner. The one which served as dining-room was very modestly furnished, but everything was scrupulously clean. Upon the table, prepared for the evening meal, was displayed a cloth of dazzling whiteness. Porcelain plates, and dishes of metal which shone like silver, completed the arrangements.

"You must please to excuse me," continued the good woman, "but you see, M. Loyal, I am so happy, my heart is so full of joy at seeing you again, you to whom we owe our lives, our honour, our happiness even—"

"There, there, behold me changed into a good fairy. You'll see they'll give me the Montyon prize, because, happening one day to come across some honest folk in embarrassment, I helped them out of it, and moreover, because, finding all ready to my hand a clever, handy, and hardworking fellow, I took possession of him, in order to make of him an excellent servant, whom I can trust like myself. And, talking about that, where is our dear Victor ?"

"Not back from the office yet."

"And yet I told him never to stop after five. That boy works too hard. You'll see, he'll force me to raise his salary at the end of the year."

And M. Loyal, who had seated himself in an arm-chair, winked knowingly.

"Good M. Loyal! your delicacy again, ever announcing to us a fresh act of kindness; what can we do to prove to you our gratitude?"

"Am I not paid, I repeat, over and above the service which your son does me, by the pleasure of seeing you happy and tranquil, you and your charming daughter? But Mademoiselle Louise is not here either?"

"She is gone to take her embroidery home, and perhaps she has called at the office for her brother. It's that that has made them late. Ah, I can hear them coming up now."

Hurried footsteps, in fact, were heard on the stairs. The key turned in the lock, and a clear voice gave vent to a joyous exclamation.

"M. Loyal! how nice!"

And a charming young girl of sixteen, fair and rosy, threw herself into the arms of the inquiry-agent, who had risen to receive her. He kissed her forehead paternally.

"Still pretty and gay, my little Louise," said he, putting on one of those insipid smiles which were familiar to him, "and your brother?"

"Why, he's coming."

"Here I am, M. Loyal," said Victor, who had remained standing at the door.

Victor Borin was a man of about thirty, rather above the average height, thin and slightly built. He wore his hair cut short, but his chestnut beard was allowed to grow full. Though he was fairly good-looking, there was noticeable about him a certain amount of indecision, of hesitation, which, at first glance, was apt to prejudice anyone against him. M. Loyal was the first to hold out his hand. Victor seemed loth to take it.

"Well, my son," said Madame Borin, in a tone of tender reproach, "what are you thinking of? This good M. Loyal, our benefactor, your second father, does us the honour to come and see us, and you greet him like that!"

"Pardon me, mother, but I was rather surprised, and—"

"And so was I," interrupted Louise, laughing, "but I rushed at M. Loyal's neck directly."

"Because you love me, my little Louise."

"Oh, yes, with all my heart," said the young girl.

"Whilst that sly Victor is a monster of ingratitude who detests me on the sly."

"Oh, sir, can you think that?"

"No, no, my boy, that's only my joke. I know your good heart and your devotion too well. I was just talking about it to your good mother."

"And M. Loyal even gave me to hope that before long—"

"Hush! Madame Borin! *superlipopette!* I must never tell you anything! What a chatterbox, what a chatterbox! But that's not all, I have a word to say to Victor; will you let us go into the next room?"

At these words Victor turned pale. It appeared as if this interview was expected and dreaded by him.

"Why, M. Loyal, are you not at home here?"

"Oh, I sha'n't keep him long, the more so that you are just going to have your meal, and this little girl must have a good appetite, at her age."

"Ah! M. Loyal," said Louise, blushing like a rose, "if you would—"

"What, my pet?"

"If you would have dinner with us!"

"How can you think of it, my child?" said her mother. "We haven't fit dinner. M. Loyal would not—"

"Yes, yes," said the inquiry-agent, "I accept with pleasure, on the contrary, and the more so that I can smell something savoury in the kitchen."

"It's cabbage soup."

"Cabbage soup, and you never told me? Ah! Madame Borin, Madame Borin, give me a plate, I shall invite myself."

"Then Louise will run round to the eating-house and fetch something."

"Let no one move!" cried Loyal gaily, "let no one move, or I'm off and shall shake off the dust from my feet upon your mat, and never come again. To table, at once! Give me some soup, quick, Madame Borin; we can chat after dinner."

It was but a respite, but the young man gave a sigh of relief. They took their places. M. Loyal insisted on having Madame Borin on his right and Louise on his left. By this arrangement he sat opposite to Victor, whom he seemed to cover and fascinate with his glittering eyes. He was in the highest spirits, surpassingly agreeable, now joking with Madame Borin, whom he dubbed the queen of cooks, now inquiring about the aspirations, desires and needs of the family, and promising not only the continuation of their present happiness, but unhopèd-for improvement. The old mother and Louise were enchanted. Victor alone remained gloomy. It was because he knew that his affected pleasantness concealed some danger, that M. Loyal, like a cat, drew his claws in before making use of them. And M. Loyal-Francœur's claws were sharp! Dinner was over at last. At Madame Borin's request, M. Loyal had consented to allow Louise to go and fetch a bottle of Chartreuse, of which he sipped two glasses like a true Sybarite.

"If you like, my dear Victor, we will talk over our little affair now," said he, wiping his lips.

"Go, my child, go," said Madame Borin, "and follow the advice of our worthy M. Loyal; he will give you none but good."

"I know it, mother," replied Victor, with a bitter smile.

The old woman lighted a candle, and the two men went into the bedroom. Hardly had Madame Borin left them alone, than the expression of both changed. Victor did not attempt to conceal his uneasiness, and M. Loyal became serious.

"What is the matter sir, and why have you pursued me here?" asked the young man.

"I came here because I was too late to go to your office. What the matter is you must know well. The matter is that the moment for action is come."

"Then you have not given up this odious business?"

"Given it up! Why, I neglect everything else for it. Odious business! Come, I say, are you going to begin to preach now?"

"But—"

"It would be out of place, I warn you; when I command, I insist upon being obeyed, and, above all, obeyed without objections being raised."

"It is because, the more I think of it, the more horrible this thing appears to me. Dishonour an innocent young girl, break an old man's heart; it seems to me that in lending myself to that I should bring misfortune on my sister—who is innocent, too, and on my poor old mother."

"Bravo!" sneered M. Loyal, "that's a sentiment that would go down splendidly in a tirade at the Ambigu; do you know you're quite eloquent, and you plead your cause beautifully. But do you think that if you resist me, the position of your mother and sister will be a very enviable one?"

Just recollect how and where we got to know one another. I was, as I am now, in business, and I discounted bills—under favourable conditions. A young man—a student—came and called on me and brought me bills, with the necessary three signatures. The young man was not rich. His family, consisting of an old mother and a young sister, a child of thirteen, had made every sacrifice, had pledged, mortgaged, sold everything in order that he might be able to pursue his studies. You remember that, eh, Victor?"

"Why remind me of it?" muttered the young man mournfully.

"And he, the young fool, launched in the pleasures of Paris, he had madly squandered the fruit of these painful sacrifices. His mother was economising her last crust of black bread, convinced that the coming examinations, for the expenses of which she had sold her wedding ring, would make her son a lawyer. And the young man was not even dreaming of passing them. He had spent in dissipation the last money which it was in his mother's power to send him. I discounted his bills—but when they fell due; when, after having been presented to no purpose at his house, the endorser was called upon to pay, the latter stated that his signature was a forgery. The rash youth might have gone to the galleys, and then what would have become of his good old mother and his charming sister? Tell me, Victor, what would have become of them?"

"Oh! you have already made me pay dearly for that service," said the wretched young man gloomily.

"Fool! Do you think that it was out of pure philanthropy that I sacrificed my money and got you out of the scrape? Come, come! I did more. I brought your mother and sister up from the country, and I provided them with the means of livelihood. For you I found an occupation."

"The occupation of a spy!"

"Even that's too good for a forger," said Loyal-Francœur harshly.

"Oh! forger!" protested Victor.

"Yes, forger, certainly, both in fact and in law. Oh, I can see what you're going to say. You had genuine signatures on other bills, and these were only renewals. You believed that your mother was in quite a different position, and you were certain that the bills would be paid when they were due. Not a bit of it. There are in Paris a hundred young fellows who go through this performance every day, and who not only get off, but afterwards become wealthy men, respected, and—honest. Very well, but your mother was at the end of her resources, and you were risking imprisonment. I saved you from imprisonment. I took your mother and sister out of misery. But I kept the bill. With one word I can set the law in motion against you. Beware! You will tell me that you have rendered me services. Granted. For the last three years you have kept an intelligence and copying-office. Thanks to that, you have furnished me with much important information, many useful documents. But what of that? I have ten men to take your place, if I please. From you I expect, I insist upon having, more. I have a splendid affair on hand, one of those chances that don't come once in a lifetime. For the last six months I have been leading up to it. For it I have neglected my other business, I have strained my mind, spent my money, and you think that, on the brink of success, I should be fool enough to abandon it? Really, now! Listen, to-day I put the finishing touch to it. I have burnt my ships. By to-morrow every thing must be concluded!"

"Command, I will obey,"

"That's the style. That's the way to look at things. And, who knows? perhaps this affair may do you a good turn at the same time; you have only to show yourself clever and bold. After all, you're of good family, you're as good as M. Paul Clairac. The girl will not be so much to blame."

"And if I failed?"

"That will be because you went about it badly, my lad, and I won't allow that, I will not! If I'm obliged to throw my cards up, if the bomb bursts, its fragments shall kill you too. Now I have done. Let us go into the room again, and keep calm. You mother and sister must not suspect anything."

Victor did not reply. He went to the wash-hand-stand, dipped a towel in the water and bathed his face with it several times. Then, as M. Loyal was about to turn the handle of the door to leave the room, he asked in a low voice:

"And if I succeed?---to the end?"

"What do you mean? 'to the end'?"

"If they consent to let me marry the girl?"

"You know my conditions. You will hand over to me two-thirds of the marriage portion, on the day after the wedding; two-thirds of the succession on the day of the Colonel's death, and I am counting on the shock which this affair will cause to shorten the delay which separated us from that death."

"It is horrible!"

"Fool! Are you going to have any scruples? Scruples are all very well for those who are rich; for others they are more than a fault, they are a vice."

He had opened the door; the two women were sitting down, Madame Borin hemming dusters, Louise doing embroidery.

"The conference is over," said M. Loyal gaily. "A glass of sugar and water if you please, Madame Borin. Ah! this boy is such a trouble to me; if you only knew how obstinate he is!"

"Why do you not pay attention to our good M. Loyal, my son?" said Madame Borin reproachfully, whilst Louise hastened to prepare a glass of sugar and water. "You must know that he will only give you good advice; you must obey him blindly; do you hear?"

"I will do so, mother," murmured Victor, in a choking voice.

M. Loyal-Francœur drank his glass of sugar and water in little sips, like a man who is rewarding himself for all the trouble he has taken for the successful conduct of an affair. Madame Borin and Louise looked at him smilingly.

## VII.

### AT CHARLY.

PRINGY, on hastily leaving the house in the Rue des Chantres, had jumped into a cab and ordered the driver to take him to the Eastern Railway Station. It wanted a few minutes of mid-day, he might catch the southern express. He told the driver to hurry, promising him a liberal tip. Unfortunately, at the entrance to the station, there was a block. This caused a loss of two minutes, exactly the time that was left him. The count

arrived in time to see the wicket close. It is necessary to have one of these little accidents, in order to understand the anger, the rage which they cause. Impatient to know all, and to verify the suspicions which M. Loyal-Francœur's ambiguous allegation had inspired him with, he was eager to be at the end of his journey, and now, just for want of a minute, he would have to put up with a long wait. He made inquiries of a porter. There was no other train before three o'clock ! Three centuries during which he would have to restrain his impatience ! For a moment Pringy thought of driving back to the Rue des Chantres, in order to demand a categorical explanation. He had no doubt that, by paying a good price, it would be possible to obtain it from the inquiry-agent, with whom everything appeared to be regulated according to tariff. But, since he had begun, it was better to verify the facts himself. Perhaps, after all, this man had only told him this story in order to get a few louis out of him, and it was nothing but an odious calumny. The count remembered, too, that it was a quarter-past twelve and he had not yet breakfasted. In the morning's excitement he had forgotten it.

He went into a restaurant, ordered two or three dishes, which he hardly touched, drank two glasses of Bordeaux and a cup of coffee, paid the bill and looked at the station clock. Hardly an hour had passed. Pringy went to the book-stall, bought half a dozen papers, and glanced through them one after the other. All said much the same things, all related—with different comments, it is true—the same events, the same facts. He ended by crushing them up and throwing them away. Then he took out his watch and found that it was only half-past one. He swore a hearty oath, which made five or six people turn round. He became aware then that his agitation, his impatience, and his strange manner had drawn on him the attention of the passengers, and that they were looking at him curiously. Not wishing to make an exhibition of himself, he went out and, turning to the right, mounted the steps which led to the Rue d'Alsace and from there to the Rue de Lafayette. Wandering along he reached the Rue de la Chapelle, plunged into the winding streets of the Goutte d'Or district, and finally succeeded in so completely losing himself that he had to ask his way back to the station. But his walk in the bitter cold had calmed his nerves a little and had occupied some time. When the count entered the station again passengers were taking their tickets for the Château-Thierry train. He took a first-class ticket to Nogent-l'Artaud and ensconced himself in an empty compartment.

The journey from Paris to Nogent is a long one and appears to be almost interminable, from the frequent stoppages of the slow train. Accordingly, the count's ill-temper returned with increased violence. Things were still worse when, at a quarter to six, he finally arrived at Nogent-l'Artaud. As the man in the Rue des Chantres had informed him, one travels in a conveyance from Nogent to Charly. Now, if a train is slow, a conveyance is doubly so. Pringy had hurried into it, thinking that it would start at once. But the driver had no such idea. He was sitting calmly on a table in the cloak-room, talking to a porter. Two travellers, a man in a blouse and an old lady, who were, no doubt, well acquainted with the usages and customs of the locality, had taken their places inside and had mournfully settled down, covering themselves with shawls and rugs. The count watched them muffling themselves up ; then, seeing that no start was made, he called out to the driver :

“ Well, are we going to start ? ”

"Directly, sir. I'm waiting for a passenger who's busy."

The passenger, a fat, jovial personage, in an overcoat and cap of otter skin, arrived at last, carrying a large bag which he had been to fetch from a neighbouring house and which he placed between his legs in the conveyance. The driver was still in the cloak-room.

"Come, are we going to start to-day or to-morrow?" cried Pringy, exasperated.

"I've some luggage to load!" replied the driver, tranquilly. "We shall be off directly."

"He must load the luggage," remarked the old lady, looking inquisitively at the count. "He is all alone, poor fellow," she added. And, being evidently anxious to engage in conversation, she continued:

"You are going to Charly, no doubt, sir?"

The count looked at her and replied sulkily:

"Of course; since I'm in the 'bus."

"Ah, but you might be going as far as Pavant, which is a little further. And, not to be inquisitive, is this the first time you have been in our parts?"

The count was dying to tell the old witch to go to the devil and mind her own business. But he reflected. She was fond of talking. From her he might obtain all the information of which he was in want. So he replied:

"The first time, madame; and I am perplexed."

"Ah! you have come on business?"

"Exactly so. I have been asked by a family to go and see a baby which is at nurse, in order to find out how he is and whether he is well taken care of. You, who belongs to these parts, madame—"

"A native born, and, for the last forty-eight years, I may venture to say, honourably known. Ask anyone you like, Madame Bonneau—"

"You who belong to these parts," continued Pringy, "ought to know all the inhabitants."

"I know them, I respect them, and, I may venture to say, I am respected by them."

"Certainly. Then possibly you could tell me something about the nurse."

"Speak, sir. What is her name?"

"Madame Derousse."

"Madame Derousse, Victoire Derousse, Victoire. I know her well. She nursed my eldest. You couldn't have done better, sir. For the last twenty years—Ah! good gracious!"

A violent shock interrupted Madame Bonneau. The driver had just hoisted an enormous box on to the box-seat of the conveyance.

"Ah!" continued the worthy lady, "that's just like Louis; I thought the ceiling was coming down. It's given me a buzzing in my ears."

"Excuse me, but you were saying, madame—?" inquired Pringy, who found the old lady's talk interesting now.

"I was saying—whatever was I saying? I forget altogether."

"You were telling me about Madame Derousse."

"Ah! yes, Victoire. Well, sir, as I was saying—"

"Step in, gentlemen, step in!" shouted the driver at the door. Everyone had stepped in long before. But such is the invariable formula before starting. Grand-Louis mounted on the box, whipped up his horse and started at a slow trot in the direction of the suspension bridge. Madame Bonneau was silent. The count, who was anxious to know more, returned afresh to the charge.



"Well, madame, you were saying that this nurse—"

"An excellent woman, respectability itself."

"Where does she live?"

"At the end of the town. You follow the 'Pavement' as far as the Grande-Rue, and close by, on the right, you will find her little house."

"And do you know the child she is nursing at present?"

"I have seen him occasionally—a very quiet, very pretty little boy, a child of mystery, it would seem, for he is well looked after; but no one ever comes to see him. He is, according to what Victoire told me, the son of a grand lady living in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But that's gossip. You know better than I do, sir, since you have come to see the child."

"No matter; continue, madame."

"Yes, you have come to see whether the child is well cared for. That he is, I venture to say, and well. But, now I come to think of it, perhaps you're the papa?"

"No; only a friend."

"Well, sir, you can tell your friends that never was confidence better placed. For the matter of that, if anyone wanted to know anything, I am honourably known in all Charly, I venture to say nobody will contradict me."

The Count de Pringy knew enough. He let Madame Bonneau run on. Moreover, although progressing at a very slow rate of speed, Grand-Louis' van had reached its destination. It stopped before the Hôtel Saint-Martin.

"All step out!" cried the driver. "Fares, please, ladies and gentlemen!"

Pringy paid his fare. It was almost dark. He received some final instructions from Madame Bonneau and followed the 'Pavement,' as she said, on his way to Madame Derousse's, the nurse. Charly is not a large place: it is, in spite of its title of town, simply a clean and coquettish village, inhabited by a well-to-do and free-and-easy population. As in all little places, the arrival of a stranger is an event. Accordingly, although it was dusk and the lighting of the streets of Charly is very rudimentary, the count saw, as he walked along the 'Pavement,' inquisitive faces appear at doors and windows, to stare at him. Thus it was, it may be said, beneath the eyes of the population, that he arrived at Madame Derousse's cottage.

Madame Derousse—Victoire, as she is called in the neighbourhood—was an excellent woman who bravely devoted herself to the industry of a nurse—a veritable industry for her. Married ten years ago, she has already had seven children, and counts on having at least as many more. These children are no burden to her, on the contrary, they are the implements of her trade. As soon as one of them is born, the mother comes to Paris, and as her child is a magnificent one, she soon finds a situation as nurse in a wealthy family. This situation she keeps as long as possible. If the child is weaned the nurse has still enough milk to undertake another. This one weaned, she becomes a mother again and prepares for two future nurslings. Besides this, as it is the custom in every Parisian family to be liberal towards the nurses, at every trip to Paris she goes and pays a round of visits, of which the number increases from year to year, and at each house she receives a present.

When Pringy arrived in front of the cottage he found the door closed, but a bright gleam of light flashing from the windows of the first floor proved to him that there was some one at home. He looked. In a large fireplace was burning a wood-fire, in front of which some babies' clothes were hanging to dry. On either side of the fireplace, on two little chairs

just alike and facing one another, two babies, the two foster-brothers, were watching each other and warming themselves. The count knocked softly, there was no reply. He knocked again, more loudly. The barking of a dog, which he had not seen lying in a corner, burst out all at once, and with common consent the two little children began to cry.

"What's the matter, Fido? Who's there?" asked a shrill voice. The door opened, and Madame Derousse, escorted by five of her seven children, made her appearance.

## VIII.

### THE REGISTERED LETTER.

MADAME DEROUSSE was a little woman of thirty, plump, rosy, and smiling. If her occupation of a nurse, and the preliminaries which it requires had not worn her down a trifle, she would not have been bad-looking. But the *beauté du diable*, that is to say freshness, which had formerly been her only attraction, had long disappeared. Her chubby cheeks, once red as two apples, were now wrinkled and blotched. She opened the door and, seeing a stranger, a well-dressed gentleman, asked pardon for having kept him waiting.

"No matter, my good lady," said the count, pushing past her into the house; for, as she made her excuses she left him standing outside; "just let me come in and warm my feet at your famous fire whilst I tell you what has brought me."

"Of course! whatever am I thinking of? Come in, sir. Loulou, give the gentleman a chair, quick!"

Loulou, the eldest of the young Derousses, a fine lad of eight, plump and chubby-cheeked, replied only by thrusting his first finger a little more deeply into his nose, and did not move.

"No use troubling the child," said the count, going and fetching the chair himself and placing it before the fire. "I'm quite comfortable now; we will have a chat, if you don't mind."

"Certainly. What can I do to serve you?"

"You have here at nurse a little boy from Paris, one of these two children, no doubt?" asked Pringy, looking at the two babies sitting motionless on their chairs, like two tiny caryatides.

"Little Jean, yes, sir; there he is."

Pringy looked at the child who, like all infants, had absolutely no resemblance to any one.

"And," said he, lowering his voice, "could you show me that child's certificate of birth?"

"Ah! good heavens! are you a magistrate or a police commissary?" cried Madame Derousse, terrified. Then, collecting herself:

"Ah! no, what a fool I am," she continued; "you're the inspector of nursed children."

"Exactly so," replied Pringy, gladly embracing this opportunity of avoiding a delicate explanation.

"Well, my good sir," said the nurse with embarrassment, "the difficulty is this, I haven't got the certificate."

"How is that?"

"This is the first time, I assure you, M. l'inspecteur, that I've taken a

child under these circumstances. It's a long story, like *Victor, or the Child in the Forest*, a book I bought at Château-Thierry, and which M. l'inspecteur must know."

"Well, well," said the count, who was not anxious to hear the adventures of the *Child in the Forest*, but who was eager to know those of little Jean. "So you have not got the certificate?"

"No, M. l'inspecteur."

"Not even a memorandum, a certificate of baptism?"

"Nothing at all, M. l'inspecteur."

"The deuce! my good woman, this is a serious thing. But at any rate you can tell me the name of the father and mother."

"Alas! no. But let me tell you how it all happened. I had just had my little Arthur, my last one, that one, opposite Jean. I was waiting to get a little strength before going to Paris, when one evening, as it might be now, there is a knock at my door. A lady comes in. This lady, a midwife that I knew by sight, from having met her in the registry-office, was carrying a newly-born child in her arms. 'You're Madame Derousse?' she asks. 'I've brought you a nursling—one that will pay you well.' I naturally thanked her, and asked her for the child's papers, as is always done. 'Never mind that,' she says. 'You charge thirty francs a month, don't you? I'll give you forty, and there are two months in advance, with twenty francs for sugar and soap. Every month you'll receive your money by post, and it will always be in advance. Now, as to the child's name, it's Jean, and he was born on the twenty-first. That's all that you require to know.' She put the baby, who was crying, on the bed. He was very hungry, poor dear little angel, and I gave him the breast. Whilst he was suckling the midwife put a hundred-franc note in my hand, threw down in the corner a large parcel containing the layette, and went as she had come, without even saying 'good-day.'"

"And you have never seen this woman since?"

"Never."

"You know her name, at any rate?"

"No, sir."

"But who told you she was a midwife?"

"I'd often seen her at the registry office. That was why I trusted her."

"And since then, have you received the money regularly, as promised?"

"Certainly, sir, on the first day of each month."

"And who brings it?"

"It comes in a letter, a registered letter."

"Have you one there?"

"Yes, sir. Here is one."

She handed him an envelope embellished with five black seals. He examined these seals and could not suppress an exclamation of surprise. They were armorial seals, and on each one the count recognised the escutcheon of the De Rieumes family! Doubt was now out of the question: Jeanne de Rieumes, Paul Clairac's betrothed, was this child's mother! This young girl, so pure and candid in appearance, was a vile creature. He remained there, dumbfounded, as if he had not foreseen this discovery, and as if he had not, in a certain fashion, come to make it. The nurse looked at him curiously.

"Well, does this letter tell you anything, sir?" she asked, at last. He started. He had forgotten the woman's presence.

"No, no," said he, growing outwardly calm. "I was only thinking that

this might serve, in a measure, to explain your irregular position. I will keep it for that reason."

He placed the envelope in his pocket-book, with the memorandum that he had taken of the midwife's abode. The nurse raised no objection, being only too pleased to meet the wishes of "M. l'inspecteur." The latter had hastened to depart. He was longing to get to Paul Clairac, to tell him all, to render him the immense service of preventing him from marrying a woman as corrupt as faithless. Unfortunately, he found it as difficult to get away from Charly as it had been to arrive there. The last train for Paris is due at Nogent-l'Artaud at a quarter to nine, and it was now past eight. Grand-Louis' conveyance was already on its way to the station. M. de Pringy decided to sleep at Charly. The attractions offered by the place not being considerable, and the count being, moreover, very fatigued from the excitement and travels of the day, he made a hasty dinner at the Hôtel Saint-Martin and went up to his bedroom, giving orders that he should be called early.

In spite of his fatigue he slept badly ; the events of the day were recalled in the form of nightmares, and he felt gloomy and despondent on taking his seat at six o'clock the next morning in the train which took him back to Paris. His task, however, was not yet concluded. On the contrary, the most terrible part of it was about to begin. After having visited his chambers, in order to make the necessary changes in his toilet, he drove to Paul Clairac's. But fate had decreed that delay should haunt M. de Pringy in the course of this business. Paul Clairac was not at home ; he was breakfasting with the De Rieumes. The count's first idea was to wait for him. It seemed to him a little too bad to go to Colonel de Rieumes' house to break off his daughter's marriage. But he was so exasperated at the girl's deceitfulness that he would not put off the task of unmasking her for a single instant.

He drove to the De Rieumes' house in the Rue Bellechasse.

## IX.

### A DIFFICULT EXPLANATION.

SINCE he had been on the retired list, "since his ear had been split," as he said, Colonel Jean de Rieumes had lived in the old family mansion in the Rue Bellechasse. This house is one of those dwellings dating back from the good old times when, not having, as at the present date, to measure the ground by the yard and to economise space like some precious object, people went to work building at their ease. There is little to be seen from the street. In those days the aristocrats did not care about living on intimate terms with the passers-by. The porter's lodge and servants' offices, therefore, alone look on the street, from which a broad and vast court-yard separates the master's abode, reached by a flight of six steps. Behind, extensive gardens stretch away as far as the Rue de Bourgogne.

A widower for many years, the colonel lived there alone, and devoted himself ardently to his two favourite passions, gardening and oil-painting. On this morning he had invited Paul Clairac to breakfast, his son-in-law, as he called him, although the marriage was not to take place for a fortnight's time. But the announcement had been made and, what appeared a much more serious matter to the colonel, promises had been exchanged. M. de Rieumes, then

had asked Paul Clairac to come early, so as to be able to have a talk with him. He had taken him to his studio—a large room with pictures, bronzes, plaster casts, easels covered with sketches—which he had fitted up himself, and whence, through two large windows opening on the garden the colonel, whilst daubing his canvases, could throw a paternal glance on his borders and melon-frames. While waiting for Jeanne, who had not yet come down from her room, Clairac had handed himself over entirely to his father-in-law, who was explaining to him his theories on art and forcing him to admire his pictures. It must be confessed that with the cowardice of a lover the young artist went into ecstasies over horrible performances of which the veriest dauber would have been ashamed.

"Here, look at this, son-in-law," said the colonel, pointing with his maulstick to a canvas half covered with paint, and upon which stood mathematically correct rows of trees. "Just look at this forest and tell me whether your daubers of the present day can do as well."

"The trees are perhaps a trifle too like one another," hazarded Clairac timidly.

"What? not one of them resembles its neighbour. But look more closely. I don't go in for 'impasting,' like your new school; I don't paint with a broom, nor with a knife. When I paint a leaf, it will bear looking at with a microscope. I'm not afraid of any faults being found in it."

Eleven o'clock struck. A servant knocked at the door and announced that "Mademoiselle had come down."

"Come along, son-in-law, don't keep the ladies waiting," cried the colonel, hastily throwing off his blouse and putting on his coat.

"To the dining-room, forward, march!"

Jeanne was awaiting her lover, not in the dining-room, but in a little room adjoining. The colonel and Clairac were about to enter, when another servant approached the young artist and handed him a letter.

"Excuse me," said Clairac.

"Certainly, but be quick. Some one is waiting for you, you know."

The young man tore open the envelope. It contained a card on which were written a few words in pencil.

"De Pringy," he read aloud. "He begs me to go down at once, as he has something important to say to me."

Colonel de Rieumes had known Pringy as a sub-lieutenant. He had seen him several times since, and had even had him under his orders for a short time.

"Pringy!" he cried, "Captain Pringy. *Sapristi!* let him come in. I shall be delighted to shake hands with him. Pierre, ask him in, or rather, I'll go down myself."

And with his usual impetuosity, the worthy man, rushing towards the entrance-hall, hurried with outstretched hands towards the amazed count.

"*Mille tonnerres*, my dear captain!" said the colonel, taking the visitor's hand before the latter had time to withdraw it, "to what extraordinary circumstance do I owe the pleasure of a visit from you? Why, we're old friends, eh! Do you remember Versailles, where I came near having your head off? You must bear me a grudge for it, since you are my son-in-law's friend and yet never come under my roof?"

Much embarrassed, for he had hoped that Clairac would come down alone and speak to him, the count stammered a few words of excuse.

"I have you now, though, and I don't mean to let you go," continued the impetuous colonel. "You must begin by having breakfast with us

"You know Clairac already, don't you? I'll introduce you to my daughter."

"I assure you, colonel—"

"What! you can't refuse me that! You don't know my little Jeanne, she was a child when we were in the regiment. She's fit to marry now. Clairac knows something about that, the rascal! since it is he who is going to marry her. Come, Clairac, help me to persuade this obstinate fellow. Jeanne must be getting impatient and the breakfast cold."

"I join with Monsieur de Rieumes," said Paul Clairac, "in begging you to make one of us. I am, you know, already sufficiently one of the family to be able to insist."

*One of the family!* And it was precisely to prevent this that Pringy had come to fetch him. The position became more and more awkward.

"Listen, my dear Paul," said he, taking Clairac's hand, "it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to you in private, and at once. I have something exceedingly serious to say to you."

"Well, go into the drawing-room," exclaimed the headstrong colonel, "go and tell your tale. Look here, I give you ten minutes. At the end of that time you will come to breakfast. I have got something of importance to tell you as well, captain, some splendid things to show you. You didn't know that I went in for gardening. I have a hot-house, on a new model invented by myself. All the gardeners who see it are amazed at it."

"On my honour, colonel," said Pringy, making a stand at last, "it is impossible for me to accept."

"Then I won't insist, although if we were still with the colours—There, Clairac, take the captain to the smoking-room and hear his confession. Only don't make it too long. Jeanne is waiting for you."

He took himself off, after having made an almost cool bow to the count. The latter sadly returned it and followed Clairac into the smoking-room.

"Now," said the artist, motioning to his friend to take a seat, "what's going on? what is it that is serious enough to make you come and seek me at my betrothed's home?"

"Paul!" cried Pringy, "you have known me for a long time. I have been a friend of your family, you can trust me, can you not? Well, you must leave this house on the spot!"

"What do you mean?"

"That you are the victim of an infamous comedy; that you have been drawn into a trap; that the woman whom you were about to marry is unworthy of you."

"Jeanne!"

"Unworthy of you, I repeat, and I will give you proofs of it, when you like."

"Wretch!" cried Clairac, springing up in menacing fashion, as if he were about to throw himself on the count. But he controlled himself by a violent effort and continued in a calmer voice:

"Listen in your turn, Pringy. Yes, you have always been good to me, you have been almost a father to me; I have great obligations towards you. But what you are doing now is infamous and cowardly. You are calumniating the most adorable, the most innocent, the purest of girls. You are insulting the woman who will soon bear my name."

"That is exactly what I want to prevent."

"I think you are going mad, and I will hear no more," said the artist, walking towards the door.

"No, no. You shall remain and hear me out. Like St. Thomas you

shall touch with your finger and be convinced. I have told you that your betrothed was unworthy of you. I have brought proofs of it."

"Enough, I say, you are mad!"

"You are mad yourself, to refuse to accept this evidence. Look," said Pringy, taking from his pocket-book the envelope of the letter which he had obtained possession of at Charly. "Look at these seals, do you recognise the arms?"

"*De gueules à la guirre d'argent*, yes. They are the arms of the De Rieumes family. Well?"

"And the writing, do you know it?"

"It is like Jeanne's. But what does this envelope prove, and where did you get it?"

"This envelope, Paul, belongs to a registered letter, by which an unknown mother sends to a nurse the money for the keep of a child whom she is having brought up secretly. This envelope I myself obtained from little Jean's nurse, for the child's name, like his mother's, is Jean, so they told me. Do you understand now why I have come to tell you that you must leave this house without a moment's delay and never enter it again?"

"And what prompted you to engage on this search?" asked the artist, whose face had become livid.

"Chance—a word overheard, which I promised not to repeat," hastily replied Pringy, who did not care to confess that he had gone to consult M. Loyal-Franceur on matters which, after all, did not concern him. "And upon this, being puzzled, I began to investigate. I made a journey, I found out all, saw all."

And he gave a rapid account of his conversation with the woman Derousse, his suspicions, his certainty. Paul Clairac listened, digging his nails into the palms of his hands to conceal his emotion.

"Sir," said he, in a choking voice, "I shall go in my turn, and alone, to verify what you tell me. If you have told the truth, I shall know what to do. If you have lied, I swear to you that your blood shall wash out the insult which you have put upon Jeanne." He took a step towards the door. The door opened, however, and a charming young girl appeared.

"My father tells me, M. le Comte," said she, in a voice clear as crystal, "that you will not stop; I have come to see whether you will resist my entreaties."

## X.

### KIDNAPPED.

ALTHOUGH there was nothing very terrible about it, this unexpected arrival had an effect like that of a Medusa's head on the two men. They stood there, looking at her in silence, as if they had been changed to stone. The sight of her whom he loved and whom he had just heard so outrageously libelled redoubled Paul Clairac's anger and his desire to avenge the calumny. As for the Comte de Pringy, he stared at Jeanne, standing there, calm and smiling, and wondered how that pure face, those beautiful blue eyes, so limpid and truthful, that rosy, laughing mouth, so frank and so cordial, could conceal so much duplicity.

"Well, gentlemen, have I frightened you?" continued the charming girl, in a merry voice. "Am I so ugly, then?"

"Mademoiselle—" stammered Pringy, bowing, "the surprise—"

"I must have interrupted you! Perhaps you were conspiring, and you took me for the police commissary? But you feel at ease now, do you not? Let one of you give me his arm, and let us go to the dining-room, where my father must be storming dreadfully."

But neither of the men obeyed this graceful request.

"My dear Jeanne," said Paul, in a hesitating way, "some news, an unexpected mishap that M. Pringy has just told me of, obliges me to go at once—"

"A mishap!" interrupted the young girl, quickly. "But I see you are pale, Paul, paler than a simple surprise would have made you; you have had some bad news, some accident has happened. What is it? Tell me quickly!"

"Excuse me, Jeanne, I cannot."

"You cannot. You have secrets from me, from me who am your betrothed, from me who am about to be your wife!"

"This secret does not belong to me alone."

"Very well, then. But tell me, at least, that there is no danger for you, that it does not threaten our happiness. Speak, speak quickly, Paul, for you are so pale and anxious that I dread some catastrophe."

"It would be a terrible catastrophe, in truth, which caused my fears to be realised," said Paul, looking at Pringy. "And even if, as I hope, those fears are unfounded, something serious must take place before I return to you."

"What? You are going to leave us, then!"

"It is absolutely necessary. I must make a journey."

"A journey!"

"Necessitated by the news this gentleman has brought me."

"And will this journey be a long one?"

"I do not know; a few days, probably; much longer, perhaps."

"Oh!" cried the young girl, suddenly struck with an idea, "you have received bad news from your banker, you fear losses, ruin, and you are afraid that, deprived of your own means, you will meet with a cool reception here. Ah! my dear, how little you know us! Do you not know that my father is the most disinterested man in the world? And, as for myself, as for me who loves you, do you think that money considerations would make any change in me?"

"You are wrong, Jeanne," replied Paul Clairac, whom this discussion quite unnerved, "you are wrong. Do not try to discover the cause of this abrupt departure. You will know it later, perhaps—when I return and have the right to tell you all."

Pringy, too, was grieved at this scene. He saw the anguish of Paul, for whom he had a sincere affection. On the other hand, although firmly persuaded that Mademoiselle de Rieumes was guilty and was playing her part of an innocent with the perfection of an old actress, he could not help feeling a certain amount of emotion on hearing her speak of her affection for Paul and of her approaching marriage, a marriage which from that moment was broken off. Accordingly, he determined to interpose and to aim one decisive blow.

"I beg you, mademoiselle," said he, "do not try to know more at present. Clairac must set off at once to the Eastern Railway Station. There is just time to catch the train for Charly-sur-Marne."

The young girl looked at him with astonishment.



"Where is Charly-sur-Marne?" she asked.

"A little village near Château-Thierry."

"Enough, sir," said Paul Clairac, sternly, "we have remained here too long already. *Adieu*, Jeanne, or rather, I hope, *au revoir*."

He left the room. Pringy bowed to Jeanne and followed him. The young girl withdrew thoughtfully, wondering how she should explain this double departure to her father. And, at the moment when the Comte de Pringy and Paul Clairac, animated by such different feelings, crossed the threshold of Colonel Rieumes' house, the window-blind of a wine-shop opposite was carefully drawn aside, and Monsieur Loyal-Francœur's villainous face appeared. The inquiry-agent read upon the two faces the emotions which were agitating their hearts, and muttered, with a smile:

"The oven's getting hot; now's the time to put the bread in."

At the corner of the street Paul Clairac and Pringy separated. The former was eager to be off, to go and see this child, to question this woman of whom the count had told him. He had kept the envelope of the registered letter, and if what he had been told was true, if the money which this letter contained had really served to pay for the keep of a mysterious child, he would go to the post-office, would demand from the postmaster, from the secretary, from the minister himself, if need were, to inform him of the name inscribed on the register. For, after all, these five seals did not prove that the letter was from Jeanne. It might be someone belonging to the house, a kitchenmaid, the sister or relation of a groom or gardener, who, having to send the letter off, and thinking no wrong, had used the colonel's seal.

Yes, it would really be folly to believe that Mademoiselle de Rieumes, supposing her to be guilty, had been so imprudent as to use a seal bearing her arms in order to send off money whose origin it was to her interest to conceal. This seal, far from being a proof against Jeanne, was, on the contrary, the plainest evidence of her innocence. Paul Clairac felt inclined to go no further, to turn back, to return to Jeanne's house, throw himself at her feet and implore her pardon for having doubted her. Unfortunately, one never acts on these good ideas. Paul reflected that, although justified in his eyes, Mademoiselle de Rieumes would not be so before all the world, before Pringy especially, who might go and tell others that which he had told him. And the things which, to him, appeared so natural, would certainly be interpreted to Jeanne's disadvantage. Before all, it would be necessary to silence the count; before asking for Jeanne's forgiveness it behoved him to punish the slanderer.

Paul reproached himself now for having doubted for an instant and for not having, at the first word, broken off the interview by begging the count to make arrangements to receive his seconds. But, since he had gone so far, there was no drawing back, and the simplest plan would be to go and find two friends and to ask them to act as his seconds, at the same time inventing some plausible excuse. Paul Clairac had sufficient confidence in M. de Pringy's loyalty to feel certain that, the duel once arranged, he would not reveal the motive for it. He was reflecting as to the choice of two seconds, when a crowd barred his way. The crowd had collected round a greengrocer's little cart which had been overturned by a passing cab. People were calling after the driver, who had made off. As is always the case, the police were being accused of not doing their duty, although an officer was going from one group to another, inquiring in vain for the number of the cab which no one had thought of noticing, just as no

one of those who were now making such an outcry had thought of taking the horse by the bridle in order to prevent the driver from making his escape. In the first rank, putting questions to everyone, exactly like the policemen, was a gentleman in a frock-coat, who, note-book in hand, was taking down all the details of the accident. Clairac recognised Gratien Voiville, the reporter whom we have already seen communicating his impressions to M. Manuel, the police commissary. Gratien Voiville also recognised Paul and made his way towards him.

"What is the matter?" inquired the artist.

"Next to nothing; a 'spill' which I shall just notice in my paper. Only, as I was passing, I wanted to know—"

"—Ah!" said Clairac, suddenly remembering that he could not have a better second, "I'm glad I met you. Will you do me a service?"

"Ten, a hundred, if you like."

"I want you for a witness—"

"For your marriage?"

"No, for a duel."

"I should have preferred a marriage, because of the breakfast. Anyway, perhaps there will be a breakfast after the duel?"

"I don't think so."

"Is it serious, then?"

"So serious that I shall beg you not to ask me the cause."

"Certainly, but—your opponent?"

"My opponent will not ask it either, and his seconds will have the same discretion."

"Right! as for myself, you can be at your ease, silent as a mute. By-the-by, at the present moment I'm investigating, in company with a police commissary, a mysterious crime. We know a lot already, as, for instance, that an attempt has been made to conceal the identity of the corpse."

"Take care," interrupted Clairac. "In order to make me believe in your prudence, you are going to reveal a secret to me."

"No fear, my dear fellow; I say no more than suits me. And I shall say nothing about your duel, for I know nothing. But," continued the reporter, "who is to be the other second? Supposing I went and asked Tavernier, the editor of *Fencing*, or De Vaux, of the *Gil Blas*, I can promise you their help."

"No, I should prefer some one less known. I don't want my duel to make a noise; on the contrary. Go and ask my old friend, Bénassit, the artist in the Rue Lepic. With him I shall feel comfortable in every respect."

"Very good, you've only forgotten one thing—the name of your opponent?"

"The Comte de Pringy, Boulevard Haussmann."

"The Comte de Pringy!" cried Voiville with astonishment. "Why, I thought you were intimate friends!"

"Just so, and it is for that very reason that the cause of the duel must be kept a secret."

"I see, I see. Then good-bye till this evening, my dear fellow, and rely on me. But, by-the-by, are you sure that the count is in Paris?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, for the last two days he has not appeared at his club, where, as a rule, he was such a frequent visitor. People are asking—"

"Don't be alarmed; I saw him less than an hour ago."

"All right. This evening, at six precisely, you will see me."

Clairac and the reporter shook hands and parted.

It was a sad breakfast at the De Rieumes' house. The colonel could not understand and Jeanne could not explain the cause of the abrupt departure of Paul Clairac and the count. M. de Rieumes was terribly put out. He inveighed against the rudeness of young men of the present day, threatened to go to his son-in-law and withdraw his consent to the marriage, and finally went off to seek consolation in his beloved studio, where he started once more upon his forest. During this time Jeanne, alone in her room, was reflecting upon what had passed in the smoking-room. She, too, tried in vain to understand this riddle, the solution of which had so much interest for her. She became lost in thought, and time passed away. Dusk soon comes on a November day. It was only half-past five and it was already quite dark. The door opened suddenly and Mademoiselle de Rieumes' maid appeared.

"What is it, Rosalie?" asked the young girl.

"A letter which a young man has just brought for mademoiselle. He is downstairs, waiting for an answer."

"Thanks, give it to me."

A young man! Jeanne's first idea was that the letter was from Paul. She opened it hastily. The writing was unknown to her. She read:

"Mademoiselle, a person who has an important secret to reveal to you is below. But it is to you, and you alone, that he must speak. Come down into the street and bring this letter with you to prove your identity. He who is waiting does not know you."

Jeanne did not think for an instant of the impropriety and the danger of such an act. She thought that Paul was concerned, and that she would now learn the secret of the morning's scene. She threw a mantle over her shoulders, took the letter, crept downstairs, crossed the court-yard, gliding along the wall, and passed the porter's lodge without being seen. On the pavement a young man was standing.

"Are you Mademoiselle de Rieumes?" he asked, taking off his hat.

"Yes, here is the letter."

"Very well."

But, as if this word was a signal, Jeanne felt herself seized by the waist, a hand covered her mouth and stifled the cry which she was about to utter, and she was thrown, rather than handed, into a carriage which was stationed on the other side of the street. Before she could recognise her position the door was shut and the horse started off at full speed. Her confusion, surprise and terror were such, that Jeanne fainted. When she came to herself, it seemed to her that it was extraordinarily dark. She mechanically carried her hand to her face. She found that a bandage covered her eyes.

"Don't touch that!" said a rough voice in her ear, and at the same time a hand seized hers and thrust it down.

"Where are you taking me to, and what do you want with me?" asked the poor child, hardly daring to speak.

"Don't talk now. You will know when we arrive at our journey's end. All that I can tell you is that no one intends to do you harm. And now, once for all, I warn you that it is useless to try to escape or to call for help. We are far from Paris, out in the open country; there's no one near, and it would only result in your being gagged."

The man—for in the voice, whose tone was purposely disguised, Jeanne recognised that of a man—was evidently lying. They could not be so far from Paris as that. Two or three times, in spite of the bandage which,

covering her ears as well as her eyes, rather deadened her hearing, in spite of this bandage, she had noticed sounds, voices and cries which proved that they had not left the town. It is true that for the last few moments she had not heard these sounds; but she could only conclude from that that they had just passed the fortifications and entered some deserted street. The cool air which Jeanne suddenly felt on her shoulders showed that they were driving under trees, like those of a park or the large avenues which surrounded the Ecole Militaire. This was all that she could guess, for she did not know how long her swoon had lasted and, as a consequence, how far the carriage had gone. But, as far as she could make out, they were not far from their starting-point, and must be at that moment going in the direction of Grenelle.

Poor Jeanne was wrong; the trees which she divined were those of the Forest of Vincennes and the carriage, turning to the left, took the direction of Nogent. There is on the edge of the forest a constant succession of villas, which the tenants, Parisian men of business for the most part, only occupy during the summer months. In the winter someone in the neighbourhood, to whom the keys have been entrusted, comes every three or four days to open the windows for a few hours. From the month of October the few persons who still remain there are in almost complete solitude. This is the case, however, in almost every suburb of Paris. A sensational trial has shown us that at Chatou, in the middle of the village, one fête-day, a man was entrapped and assassinated; that his murderer carried his body in a child's carriage for a distance of at least five hundred yards, threw it from a bridge into the river, returned home, and regained Paris without having been seen by a single witness. If chance, or, to be more correct, Providence, had not caused the unfortunate Aubert's body to float as far as Pecq, Fenayron and his wife would never have had the least suspicion rest on them; never would anyone have guessed what had happened in the villa, now demolished, in the Rue d'Espréménil.

It was to just such a villa that Jeanne was being carried, and all precautions were taken, not only to prevent her escape, but—and this was most important—to prevent her seeing or being seen by a soul. At the front of the house a high gate, protected inside by panels of wood painted green, formed the entrance to the garden, which was rather small, but was filled with shrubs and small trees which, although stripped of their leaves, formed a screen which it was impossible to see through. In the middle of this garden stood the villa, two-storied, and built over a basement in which were situated the servant's offices. By a precaution fully justified by the depredations of burglars the windows of the ground-floor were barred, and those of the first floor secured by stout padlocks. Everything was thus perfectly quiet. It would have been possible, if necessary, to commit a crime there without fear of detection. It was here that Jeanne was brought. She was made to ascend to a room on the first-floor and sit down in an armchair; then she felt someone taking off the bandage. The strong light of a lamp placed on a round table in front of her rather dazzled her eyes, accustomed to darkness for the last two hours. But she recovered and looked about her. She was in a large room, simply but comfortably furnished. A large bed, two armchairs, a dressing-table, a work-table, a few pictures on the walls, a square carpet on the floor, and one door, with a bolt on the inside. Standing before her, a young man, gentle and sad-looking, seemed to be waiting. He noticed the look which she had cast in the direction of the door, and said in a voice which contrasted strangely

with the rough one which Jeanne had heard in the carriage: "You have nothing to fear, mademoiselle, no one will enter this room without your permission."

"But where am I? What am I wanted for? Why have I been brought here?" cried Jeanne, with agitation.

"Questions to which I may not reply. The only thing that I can repeat to you is, that you are in no danger; you can sleep without fear and eat and drink what is brought to you; it is only of importance that you should be away from Paris for a few days."

He bowed, walked backwards to the door, opened it and disappeared. Jeanne heard him lock it. In spite of what he had just said to her she hastened to push the bolt, after having made certain that it was a strong one, and that the screws had not been taken out beforehand. Then, taking the lamp, she carefully examined the four walls, moved the furniture, lifted the carpet to see whether the floor was not pierced by a trap-door, and, a little reassured by this investigation, sat down again in her chair. She was worn out with fatigue. But, however great the suffering it caused, she was determined not to go to sleep; she took up her position opposite the lamp, with the flame quite close to her face, in order to defy sleep. But little by little an uncontrollable stupor took possession of her senses; her eyelids grew heavy and then closed; she leaned back in her chair. She was asleep.

## XI.

### DOLORES.

FULL of zeal for the mission with which he had been entrusted, the journalist Gratien Voiville scoured Paris to arrange Clairac's duel with Pringy. He had gone to the artist Bénassit's, in the Rue Lepic. But the poor painter, already struck by the first of those paralytic attacks which are so painfully ruining his career, and which have just obliged his friends to organize an exhibition for his benefit, had been forced to refuse. Voiville did not give in. He had visited a quantity of studios, and after having made several vain attempts, had succeeded in finding a second who would consent to attend the duel without knowing the cause of it. Pringy, for his part, had had less difficulty. Having been waited upon by Voiville, he had named at once two seconds, two cavalry officers encountered at the Café du Helder, and who, when he had informed them of the conditions of the duel, had raised not the least objection.

The meeting between the seconds took place at five o'clock. By six all was settled, and the journalist went to announce it to Paul Clairac. The latter awaited him in his studio, that magnificent studio in the Place Pigalle that all artistic Paris has visited.

"Well?" asked the artist, who was striding up and down, blowing into the air the smoke from a cigar, which, in his impatience, he was literally causing to blaze.

"Well, it's all settled; you are to fight to-morrow morning at seven. I could not arrange it earlier. It's hardly daylight."

"That doesn't matter. And the weapons?"

"Swords, naturally. Naturally also the fight will stop when one of the combatants shall be unfit to go on."

"I should have preferred to the death."

"Ah! my dear fellow, that's too much. But, all the same, your opponent doesn't look like a man who would stop for a scratch. Consequently you can go on as long as you please."

"Good. And the seconds know nothing?"

"Of course not. I should not tell them, should I? We shall give it out that the cause of the duel was a political argument. That will go down well enough just now."

"Good," interrupted Clairac, throwing away his cigar and lighting another, "and where does the fight take place?"

"Officially, as usual, on the Belgian frontier. In reality no further off than the Plateau d'Avron. I know a little nook there, just the place, on the site of an old Prussian redoubt. Two duels have been fought there already without interruption. You will thank me for the suggestion."

"I thank you now. But leave me, my friend. I have many things to arrange."

"Nonsense, don't get those gloomy ideas into your head, at any rate. I've seen you fence; your wrist's right enough. Ah! by-the-bye, if you would like a last lesson, go to young Mérignac's, in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince; he's a fellow that makes no fuss, but no one will coach you like he will, and upon my word—"

"Thanks again, my friend. Excuse me, but, I repeat, I want to be left alone."

"Good-bye till to-morrow, then," said the reporter, holding out his hand; "we shall call for you at half-past five."

"I shall rely on you."

"Good-bye, then, and a good night. Go to bed. You must be composed and rested."

"Thanks."

Clairac waited until the reporter's footsteps had died away. Then he sat down at a little table, and wrote:

"JEANNE,—I have been very disloyal towards you. For a minute, excited by infamous calumnies which were told me, with an appearance of truth, I doubted you, I doubted your fidelity, your love. You must have thought my sudden departure this morning strange. You will understand it now. But will you forgive me? I shall never forgive myself. If I had the courage to submit to the punishment which I deserve, I should exile myself for ever from your presence. In any case, I must never see you again, until I have revenged you, and punished the slanderer. Jeanne, I am going to fight a duel to-morrow morning. If God betrayed the justice of my cause, if chance were to go against me, I entreat you to grant me your forgiveness, and to believe that it is to merit it that I die. Good-bye, Jeanne, I love you.

PAUL.

After writing this letter Paul remained for a long time buried in thought. This was the only one that he had to write. An orphan, an only child, he had neither father, mother, nor sister to whom to confide his last thoughts. A vision, however, floated across his mind. He saw pass, as in the murky night, a shadow, the shadow of a woman. Little by little this shadow grew more distinct. It seemed to Paul as if this woman were close to him, touching him. And this woman was not Jeanne de Rieumes. No, Jeanne was young, slight, pale, fair. The woman who stood beside him, in all the ripeness of her thirty years, was tall and strong; surrounding her face, lighted up by the warm southern sun, her black hair fell like a silky

mantle over her bare shoulders. Paul remembered. He knew this woman well ; he had known her but too well.

Five years before, Paul Clairac, then at the School of Fine Art, had gone to pass a year in Rome. It was Carnival time, that Italian Carnival so different from our cold and pitiful Carnival in France. According to custom the students at the Roman School took an active part in all the fêtes ; Paul and his comrades were in no wise behind-hand. They gave themselves over to the festivities with all the "go" of the celebrated *furia francese*. But that year there was an additional attraction for them. A rich and beautiful foreign lady had invited them all to a *soirée* which, so it was said, promised to be something exceptional. None of them would have missed being there ; for this stranger, in addition to her wealth, her splendid beauty, and her cordial and charming hospitality, was surrounded by the attractions of a mysterious existence. Her name, no less than her country, was a matter of uncertainty.

According to some she was Spanish, others said a South American. At Rome she was known under the name of Madame Wilson, and was said to have lost her husband, a millionaire merchant of New York, at the age of twenty-five ; but there are so many Wilsons in New York that inquisitive people had not been able to discover to what family or to what branch of commerce the deceased had belonged. Now, in the course of their investigation, these good people, it appears, had heard it said that in London, where the beautiful American had stayed some little time, she had been seen in the company of her husband, a hidalgo, of the bluest blood, like all hidalgos, and who owned a whole catalogue of sonorous names and titles. A fact which gave this story an air of truth was, that there was staying at this time with Madame Wilson a cousin, a pure-blooded Spaniard, a charming man, by-the-bye, but a ferocious guardian, and whose name was Don Pedrillo Moreno de la Concha, Marquis de la Habana, Comte de San-Fernando y Galiano, lieutenant-general in the service of His Catholic Majesty, and decorated with a round dozen of various orders. This cousin, said scandal, was the late official London husband. But scandal only said this beneath its breath, for Don Pedrillo was a first-rate swordsman, and two or three young Romans who had been too free with Madame Wilson had been laid low, grievously wounded by the noble Spaniard.

Well, in spite of this lesson, people told of something still more strange. Certain young Spaniards maintained that they recognised in Madame Wilson a ballet-girl who danced the *boléro* and *cachucha* during the evening in the public squares of Madrid, whilst lieutenant-general Pedrillo de la Habana went round with the nat. True or false, this tittle-tattle had damaged the reputation of the foreigner with the Italian nobility. But she seemed to care little for making friends, and she found amongst the youth eager for pleasure enough company for her fêtes. This evening of the Carnival, when, for the first time, Paul Clairac had been invited to one of these fêtes, happened to be the fair Spaniard's last evening in the Eternal City. The young artist had determined not to fail to be present.

The fête was splendid. Every refinement of luxury and pleasure had been brought into requisition by the organiser. The rooms of Madame Wilson's palace were like fairyland. Introduced to the mistress of the house, Clairac, rather dazzled by her luxuriant beauty, had strolled round the two dance-rooms, and drawn aside for a moment into the embrasure of a window from whence he could gaze upon the charming sight of all these costumes, varied toilets and dazzling beauties.

"Are you sulking, sir?" suddenly asked a voice whose musical ring vibrated to the depths of his heart, whilst a velvety arm was laid upon his.

Clairac, as if starting from a sound sleep, recognised the queen of the fête, Madame Wilson—the princess—as she was called by her intimate friends. He took the enchantress's arm in his own and replied, smiling,

"No, madame, I was lost in admiration."

"Of what? The fête or the women?"

"Of both."

"And who, pray, merits the rose of beauty or the crown—?"

Clairac raised his eyes and, for the second time, was so dazzled by the Spaniard's truly intoxicating beauty that he was on the point of falling at her feet and crying: "You! you alone!" But he restrained himself and said in a rather affected voice:

"There are several who deserve the rose. As for the crown, one brow only can wear it, and that brow, madame, it is needless for me to name; Rome has for a long time past recognised her sovereign."

Madame Wilson smiled, and leaning on the arm which she had, so to say, taken possession of, she began to make the round of the rooms. The object of everyone's gaze, Paul was during this promenade the envied and the criticised of all. But the attractions of his companion were such, the charm so great, the conversation so absorbing, that he did not even take any note of the fact. When she left him it seemed as if part of his soul had gone with her. He stood there in ecstasy at the remembrance of the delicious quarter of an hour which he had just passed under the empire of the enchantress. One of his companions interrupted this ecstasy.

"Take care, Paul," said he; "the cousin was looking very queerly at you just now. You might find yourself with some awkward business on hand."

Paul shrugged his shoulders. But, strolling into the card-room for a few minutes, a spectator, in stepping back, trod on his foot. He lost his temper. The awkward onlooker, who was no other than Don Pedrillo y Moreno de la Habana, laughed in his face. They fought the next morning. The Spaniard, who fenced like a professor, ran him through the shoulder, and Paul was confined to his bed for a fortnight. When he was able to get up, "the princess" and her cavalier had left Rome; but an old beggar who used to wander about the streets holding out a greasy hat to passers-by, one day gave the young artist a letter addressed to him. This letter made an appointment with him at Naples, on the shores of the marvellous bay, under the most beautiful sky in the world, the most glorious sun in Italy, that land of sun. Clairac would have journeyed to hell; he undertook the journey without further delay, braving the hidalgo and his rapier for a smile from the princess who summoned him. But neither the hidalgo nor his rapier appeared. Dolores—thus she still called herself—was alone, alone with a faithful maid, and, on his arrival, the young man was admitted to an interview for which he had not dared to hope.

There were three months of mad love, frantic, terrible love, at the end of which—one gets tired of everything, even, and especially, of love—satiety came, not for Dolores, but for her lover. Paul began to hate this semi-solitude which at first had appeared to him so delicious. At first, he asked leave to take a few walks; he did not know Naples nor its surroundings, and it was natural for him to wish to visit them a little. To begin with, he only went out for a few hours at a time, returning soon in order to



calm his mistress's jealous anger. Then, little by little, he extended the duration of his absences; then, one day, he did not come back at all. Two days later astonished Rome heard of Madame Wilson's return. The princess, like a furious lioness, came to reconquer her Paul. He yielded, but only to escape her again. In proportion as Paul loved her less, she felt her love for him increase. And, by a strange phenomenon, in proportion as she became more enamoured of him, Paul perceived that his passion gave place to a kind of terror. He was afraid of this woman; yes, afraid! and he ardently desired a rupture. This rupture came one day, and on that day it was Dolores herself who, at Paris, whither she had followed him, told her lover that she would give him back his liberty. Since then he had never seen her.

Why, at this solemn moment, when he was about to fight for Jeanne's honour, did Dolores' face appear to him? He asked himself the question with agony; he dismissed it in vain; he thrust it away in despair. Stubborn, it remained there, like a phantom. The sound of a voice roused him from this species of stupor. His servant was denying the door of his studio to some one.

"I tell you, I must speak to him instantly," cried an excited voice.

"Colonel de Rieumes!" said Paul. "Can he know the truth already?"

He hastened to open the door. The colonel, gasping, pale, his face convulsed, threw himself into his arms.

"What is the matter?" asked Clairac, dumbfounded.

"Ah, my lad, bad news, bad news! Jeanne, disappeared, carried off!"

## XII.

### THE DUEL.

"CARRIED off! What! by whom?" cried the young man, terrified.

"I know nothing. I rushed to you to know whether you knew anything, whether you had any idea—your sudden departure this morning made me think that something serious was in the wind. In fact, I was rather vexed with you for not having confided your secret to me, but everyone to his own business. After dinner, I wanted to see a friend, an old African comrade. We don't often meet, and we had a long chat, and—when I got home—ah! my lad!"

The poor old man, bursting into tears, stopped.

"Ah! it's horrible!" cried Clairac, terrified. "This is part of a mysterious plot which is gradually unfolding itself. And I, I who—But no, I have the night to myself. Come along, colonel, come, perhaps we shall find her."

Colonel de Rieumes, stunned with grief, allowed himself to be led away. Clairac sent for a cab, and they both, in spite of the late hour, drove to the préfecture of police. The préfet was not at home, but they roused the secretary on duty, who was sleeping, dressed, on a camp bedstead. Paul stated briefly to him what had happened.

"And you suspect no one?" asked the secretary.

"No one—that is to say—but, there, it's a long story. At an ordinary time it would be wrong to tell you; but, under the present circumstances, it must be done. I am going to fight a duel to-morrow morning with an old friend of mine, the Comte de Fringy."

"Well?"

"I am fighting him because he came and called for me at Colonel de Rieumes' house, and tried to persuade me not to marry Mademoiselle de Rieumes—she who has disappeared. Might not this fact have something to do with her disappearance?"

"Perhaps, indeed. Had he paid any attentions to her before? Excuse this question, gentlemen; everything must be told here."

"He did not know her. He had hardly ever met her in society."

"Then you don't think it was a case of jealousy, rivalry?"

"Impossible."

"Then, why should M. Pringy—?"

"Why! why! That is just what we are asking you," cried the colonel, with a burst of despairing rage. "If we knew we should not be here."

"Excuse me, colonel, but, if I question you, it is in your interest, it is in order to endeavour to arrive at some data."

"True, sir, but I am so hard hit."

"Listen. I shall communicate immediately with the commissary and magistrate. An inquiry will be opened to-morrow morning. Perhaps the police on beat in the Rue de Bellechasse may have something useful to tell us; perhaps some information might be picked up amongst the shopkeepers. In the meantime, so that things may be hurried forward, for it is an urgent case, I will send you to the chief of police."

The chief of police had just received his ten o'clock report and consequently was at liberty. He listened with a slightly sarcastic smile to the story of the two men. Too polite to raise the least shadow of suspicion as to the virtue of the young girl who had disappeared, he remained none the less persuaded that Mademoiselle de Rieumes, not feeling inclined to marry Clairac, and having some other love affair running in her head, had of her own free will left her father's roof in order to force him to give his consent. Accordingly he did his best to reassure the colonel, promising him that within four and twenty hours he should receive news of his daughter. If M. de Rieumes had had his own way, they would have gone straight to M. de Pringy's, who, according to him, should know everything. The chief of police had to employ all his tact to dissuade him, assuring him that it would spoil their chance of success. Instead of this, he promised to make inquiries secretly amongst his servants, in order to try and get at the circumstances of Jeanne's departure.

M. de Rieumes and Paul Clairac returned home to the Rue de Bellechasse. But there, in spite of all their efforts, they could learn nothing beyond this: A young man had sent a letter up to Jeanne, and Jeanne had at once gone out. A search was made for the letter, but without success. The morning came, seven o'clock struck. Pringy and his two seconds arrived at the Plateau d'Avron. Their cab stopped half-way up. They got out and gained the top of the plateau. The rendezvous was the old redoubt, from which, on the 29th December, 1870, the auxiliary artillery, after having heroically withstood for several hours the Prussian guns, were forced to retire with the remnant of the troops, beneath a rain of shells. The ruined redoubt was deserted.

"We are here first, gentlemen," said Pringy. "We have only to wait for our opponents."

"Let's hope that won't be long," added one of the officers, stamping his feet; "it's cold enough, in all conscience."

"Their cab was late, perhaps," remarked the other second. "It's only just seven, there's the quarter of an hour's grace."

"That's true, but, when one has to wait, and in weather like this—Ugh! Were you here at the siege?"

"Yes, I was with Vinoy's army."

"Ah! I wasn't. I was in the east. You might explain the positions to me. There's a good view from here. What was the exact position of the Prussians on the day of Champigny?"

"There, opposite the fort, masked by earthwork trenches. Come closer here, you will be able to see—"

The two officers had forgotten the duel, and the wait, and the cold. They were talking battles. The count, wrapped in a warm pelisse, but insensible in any case to cold, had sat down on the trunk of a tree and was thinking over all the events which had happened in so short a time. An exclamation from his two seconds recalled him to the present.

"Here they are at last!" they cried.

A cab was seen painfully crawling up the hill. Out of this cab stepped Gratien Voiville, the reporter, and the other second, a tall young man with a fair beard. Both of them approached, running.

"You are late, gentlemen," said one of the seconds. "But as you are here, it's all right. Let us measure out the ground."

"Alas!" cried the reporter, with a gesture of despair.

"Alas!" repeated the fair young man with the same accent and the same gesture.

"Médéric, my good fellow, keep quiet and let me explain matters."

"Explain, explain," sighed the young man.

"We had arranged a meeting, as you know, for this morning at seven. We had to call and fetch our man at half-past five. Punctually at half-past we arrived at the Place Pigalle, thinking to find Clairac dressed and ready. Not a bit of it. We rung, no answer. At last a servant with a sleepy face condescends to appear at a window and announces to us that M. Clairac left home yesterday evening with Colonel de Rieumes and they have waited in vain for him all night.

"To put it plainly, our adversary has disappointed us."

"How can I help it?" cried Voiville despairingly. "We went off to Colonel de Rieumes, at the other end of Paris; no one came to the door; time was passing, we thought we ought to inform you of this deplorable incident and make our excuses—"

"And write the account," added Médéric.

"And write the account, as my friend says."

"Allow us, first of all, to go and inform our friend of the facts."

"Certainly, that's only right."

The two officers went up to Pringy, who was awaiting, a few yards away, still sitting on the trunk of the tree, the result of the consultation. His opponent's absence surprised him strangely. He knew Paul, he knew that he was brave and loyal, and incapable from shrinking from a sword. And, besides, was it not he who had insisted on the duel? What had happened, and for what reason had Colonel de Rieumes taken Paul away? He was seeking in vain for an explanation of all these mysteries, when suddenly a man, his face livid, reeling, his clothes disordered, appeared on the top of the plateau. It was Clairac. After having passed the night in a fruitless search, he arrived, anxious to encounter his opponent, supposing his seconds had gone off without waiting for him. On seeing him in this state each

man gave vent to a cry of surprise. He took no notice of this, and approaching Pringy :

"Excuse me for being late, sir," said he, in a broken voice, "but you yourself are somewhat to blame for it ; I have passed the night in comforting a despairing father and in seeking with him her whom you have caused to disappear, after having slandered her."

"What !" cried the count, "Mademoiselle de Rieumes !"

"Silence ! you know well that no name must be mentioned here. That one less than another ; and now take your sword, and defend yourself, for, I swear to you, I will not spare you."

The seconds had undone the cloth which covered the swords. They measured them, compared them, and drew lots for positions.

"I thought you were to have brought a doctor," said one of the officers to the journalist.

"It is unnecessary. Médéric Desnard, my friend, is about to take his degree ; he will be sufficient. I, too, have studied medicine."

"Enough."

The opponents were placed in position. There was a moment's hesitation, Pringy and Clairac looking steadily at one another. Paul Clairac, being impatient, was the first to attack. The count, more composed than his adversary, parried and broke ground. Clairac took a step forward. This time Pringy, with a twist of the wrist, turned aside the sword, which, slipping from Clairac's hand shaking with fever, fell to the ground. The count, pale in his turn, lowered his weapon and waited. Voiville picked up Clairac's sword and put it into his hand again. The signal was given afresh. The artist rushed for the third time on his adversary, and the impetuosity of his attack was such, that a stain of blood appeared on the count's shirt sleeve on a level with his shoulder.

"Hold, gentlemen ! one of you is wounded !" cried one of the officers, throwing himself between the two combatants.

"It's nothing," said Pringy, rolling up his sleeve and showing a tiny wound ; "nothing but a scratch."

"It is only skin deep," pronounced the fair Médéric, doctorally.

"I formally demand to go on," said Clairac, in a stern voice.

"Be it so. Continue, gentlemen."

The combat began again, Clairac still attacking, the count parrying and breaking, without replying. He was satisfied with defending himself. He was averse to attack.

"You are wrong to spare me," shouted Clairac, with foam on his lips ; "it is one more insult added to the rest."

And he rushed with such fury on his adversary, that the latter could not parry. For the second time Clairac's blade touched flesh, but the sword which Pringy grasped, and which he mechanically extended, buried itself in Clairac's chest. He reeled, his weapon fell from his hand, a stream of blood spurted from the wound.

"A good sign," said saw-bones Médéric, who had knelt down by his side ; "it's better that the blood should flow ; with these confounded triangular blades there's always a danger of internal hæmorrhage. If no important organ has been wounded—"

"Do you require us, gentlemen ?" asked the count's seconds. "We are at your disposal."

"Thanks. Be so good as to help us to carry the wounded man to your carriage."

Four of them raised poor Paul in their arms. He had lost consciousness. When they had placed him comfortably on the cushions of the vehicle, Voiville and Médéric thanked the officers, who, having bowed to them, went up to Pringy. The latter had sat down again on the tree trunk and was holding his head in his hands. The measure of his grief was full now. Mademoiselle de Rieumes had fled, and he had just wounded, perhaps killed, his best friend ! All this in consequence of the visit which he had paid two days before to the Loyal-Francœur agency. He had been put in the way of bringing about a pretty state of things in return for his ten louis. And yet, he would like to see this mysterious individual again, to know, to know something more—The demon of curiosity, the madness for intrigue urged him on. Why had Jeanne fled ? Because she had found that her secret was discovered ; because she had guessed that Paul Clairac would soon know all. Poor Paul ! In his loving credulity he had been ready to give his life for his illusion. How bitterly did Pringy regret the involuntary wound which he had been forced to give him ! The count got into his carriage with his two seconds, and having reached Paris again, took leave of them. He returned home, changed his clothes, tore up the few letters which he too had written before the duel, and drove down to M. Loyal-Francœur's.

### XIII.

#### RUE TAILLE-PAIN.

NOTHING had changed in the Rue des Chantres. The court-yard was still just as crowded owing to the divers industries which were carried on there. The stairs were just as dark, and at the first ring the little hump-back came as before to open the door. After the summary questions which we are already acquainted with, Pringy was taken into the waiting-room. The little hump-back pointed to a chair and went on with his writing.

"Will M. Loyal-Francœur be disengaged soon ?" asked the count after the lapse of a few minutes.

"I don't know. He's not here."

"He will soon come in, I suppose ?"

"I think so."

"You can't tell me where he is ?"

"My master never informs me of his movements."

"Do you think I should find him here in an hour's time ?"

"I don't know."

Pringy was strongly inclined to take the little monster by his hump and shake him well. But he reflected that it would only result in a disturbance ; that the hump-back would cry for help ; that someone would come ; that he would be discovered in this den, where he had no wish to be seen. He preferred another method, and, taking a louis from his pocket, he went and placed it on the documents which the little clerk was industriously copying. The latter said nothing, but his eyes flashed. He closed his blotting-pad, put it into a drawer, under lock and key, and said in a most gracious tone :

"I know perfectly well where my master is ; but the fact is, he doesn't like to be disturbed there. If you will promise not to follow me—"

Pringy placed a second louis on the desk. The hump-back began to laugh.

"There! after all, there's not much to be made out of this shop," said he. "Come back in a quarter of an hour, the master will be here."

Pringy went out. The little clerk shut the door, tumbled down the stairs and ran along the Quai aux Fleurs in the direction of the Pont l'Arcole.

The place to which the little clerk went, and where M. Loyal-Francœur did not like to be disturbed, was his friend Madame Broussel's house, in the Rue Taille-Pain, at the corner of the Rue Brise-Miche. In the "Wandering Jew" Eugène Sue draws a mournful picture of the Rue Brise-Miche: "Enclosed between two immense walls, black, filthy, and dilapidated, whose height always prevents a fresh current of air and light, it is only during the longest days in summer that the sun manages to throw a few uncertain rays there; and during the damp cold of winter an icy and penetrating fog always obscures this species of oblong wall, with its miry street." The Rue Brise-Miche, thanks to the recent demolition of a building, has become larger and more improved; but the sinister portrait which Eugène Sue drew of it can with great propriety be applied to its neighbour, the Rue Taille-Pain, which connects it, by a kind of elbow, with the Rue du Cloître-Saint-Merry. The two match well, and, as for their population, the author of "The twenty-four districts of Paris," M. Alfred d'Annay, tells us that "in the fourteenth century these two streets bore such an ill name that the clergy of Saint-Merry asked authority from Parliament to drive out the women who inhabited them. The citizens made a demand in an exactly opposite sense. The citizens gained the day."

The house where Madame Broussel lived was quite in harmony with these two streets. The yellow façade, painted and patched a hundred times over, bulged out as if always threatening to give way in the middle and throw two or three stories into the street. A low door, through which could be caught a glimpse of a damp, dark passage, and narrow windows with filthy panes mended in several places with paper stars. Finally, on the top-most floor, muddy dresses, damp mattresses, linen of every description drying on the window-sills—the whole livery of crapulous misery. Two floors, the first and the second, appeared to protest. On the first floor magnificent curtains of red cotton-cloth, hermetically closed, flamed above a sign—a *chef d'œuvre*, representing a cabbage from which sprung a child who is receiving a lady wearing a hat with white plumes, blue ribbons, and a rose coloured dress puffed out by an enormous crinoline. The following inscription appeared beneath: "MADAME BROUSSEL, certificated midwife, BOARDERS TAKEN." Madame Broussel was M. Loyal-Francœur's "friend." Her apartments consisted of but three rooms, one having two windows looking on the Rue Taille-Pain; the two others, which were very small, looked on the common court-yard, a veritable well, from which rose smells of grease and unhealthy dampness. Where could she lodge her boarders? This was a mystery.

On the second floor there was no sign, but on the window-panes had been pasted a whole collection of demons, of owls cut from picture books. This was the abode, the laboratory, the studio, whatever you like, of "Madame Honoré, somnambulist, pupil of Mademoiselle Lenormand, necromancer, cartomancer; reads the future by dreams and in coffee-grounds. The only one admitted to the different European Courts and received by the principal faculties; numerous certificates." Thus announced the placard nailed up at the entrance door.

Between ourselves, it is only right to say that Madame Broussel and Madame Honoré were one and the same person. A midwife on the first, a somnambulist on the second floor, a pander at need, this woman gave the inquiry-agent powerful assistance in his unholy operations. Did anyone wish to cause dissension in a family: to take advantage of a woman's naïve credulity and persuade her to consult *Madame Honoré, somnambulist*, was an easy thing, and witnesses could then declare that they had seen the unfortunate woman enter the house of *Madame Broussel, midwife*. The husband, warned in time, could himself verify the fact. Had a young girl, crushed beneath the weight of her fault, had the imprudence to go to Madame Broussel, midwife, to learn whether this fault was irreparable, M. Loyal-Franceur, informed immediately of the fact, used threats to extort information from the girl, money from the lover, and was occasionally successful enough to get something worth having even out of the parents.

In spite of her "splendid connexions with the Academy, the Faculty of Medicine, and the different European Courts," Madame Honoré Broussel had on several occasions had little difficulties with the police. On the first of these occasions she had shown herself too complaisant with the daughter of a tradesman in the Rue Saint-Denis, who, being on the point of making a good marriage, had been anxious to avoid the consequences, already too evident, of a secret amour. The authorities, having little respect for manufacturers of angels, had begun to take proceedings against her. But, in consequence of some occult and powerful influence, these proceedings had been suddenly stopped and Madame Broussel restored to her clients. The second difficulty had arisen in consequence of a series of *magnetic soirées* in which she had been reproached with having collected together young girls, who were *too* young, and gentlemen of a certain age. Although she maintained that these soirées were exclusively scientific, that the girls had only served as subjects, and that, if the lights *were* put out, it was solely to allow the spirits to manifest themselves, the police commissary, a rough man, and a stranger to the occult sciences, had sent Madame Honoré to Saint-Lazare, on the insulting charge of inciting minors to debauch. This time also she got off, no one knew how, but she had escaped conviction.

Madame Honoré Broussel, beneath her double identity, was, it may be seen, worthy of M. Loyal-Franceur. These two beings were made to understand one another. Accordingly they gave one another mutual aid and protection. And, as a matter of fact, this is the case in this underground Paris; inquiry-agents, registry-offices, copying-offices, transactors of short loans, dealers in pawn tickets, magnetisers and somnambulists, bone-setters and charlatans, brokers, matrimonial agents, dressmakers, panders, keepers of table d'hotes and gambling hells. All these band together and form immense associations, veritable black gangs, to which each man lends his assistance, his experience, his connexions, the secrets which he surprises, the hidden sores which he discovers, and who, like the octopus seize the unfortunate wretch who falls into their power, suck his blood, gnaw his flesh, and only abandon the skeleton when nothing is left but the bones, too hard to devour.

Between M. Loyal-Franceur and Madame Honoré Broussel there was something better than a commercial association. These two lovely souls, these two noble hearts were united in love. In spite of a husband, to whom she very often alluded, but whom no one had ever known, Madame Honoré

was M. Loyal-Francœur's mistress. As Charles IX went to Marie Tonchet's, so did M. Loyal-Francœur go to Madame Broussel's to forget for the time being his troubles and the fatigues of important affairs. They were finishing breakfast, and it might be said that they had breakfasted well, for the remains of numerous eatables strewed the cloth; the dishes were placed at hazard, here and there, on the ground, and half a dozen empty bottles were ranged on one side of the table. Behind, lazily reclining in a Voltaire armchair, Madame Honoré, her fat and massive person enveloped in a blue dressing-gown, her face flushed and pimpled, and her head covered with a cap adorned with blue ribbons, was holding to the fire two enormous feet enclosed in amaranth silk stockings and shoes down at heel. Opposite, also stretching his legs towards the fire, M. Loyal-Francœur was looking over and setting in order numerous papers, on the cloth, between his cup filled with fine Mocha and a bottle of cognac two-thirds full. On the floor, a dog, a pug with watery eyes and massive proportions, like those of his mistress, was growlingly gnawing a bone.

"You are letting your coffee get cold, my dear," remarked the fat woman, without moving from her careless position. "It won't be fit to drink directly."

"All right, all right," muttered the inquiry-agent. "Don't disturb me; I've got my hands full just now."

He returned to his papers. There was first of all a tiny letter, on cream-laid paper, pink paper which time had yellowed. This letter only contained a few lines, written in a fine, sloping hand.

"I could not read your letter without being moved, madame. I will come and see you to-morrow. Have courage and hope. JEANNE DE RIEUMES."

By the side of this letter M. Loyal-Francœur placed another exactly like it, paper as well as writing. Even the tenor was almost identical; only, the word "madame" was replaced by the word "sir." Out of the encouraging letter addressed to a poor woman, unfortunate, no doubt, and imploring help, had been made a most compromising letter addressed to a man. The inquiry-agent took up another little packet tied with a rose-coloured favour. This packet contained three more letters, still the same paper, the same ink, the same sloping writing. The first of these letters was couched in the following terms:

JULY 8, 187—

"What! you still dare to write to me, after all I said to you. You must be mad; it is risking discovery. Come to-night to the usual place and at the usual time. Burn all my letters; do not fail to do this. JEANNE."

This letter, one may see, appeared to have been written long after the first one. It seemed as if several had intervened between these two. Two phrases especially were explicit: "After all I said to you," and "it is risking discovery." There had been interviews, then; circumstances to be concealed. Finally the appointment at "the usual place" left no doubt on the subject. In the other two letters the intrigue became more evident.

One, dated a year later, in the month of August, announced the coming departure for school, from which she would not return. The other, of which several words were effaced, as if by tears, spoke in vague terms of a fault committed, a delicate situation, ruined future, shame to be concealed. It announced finally a proposed journey of Colonel de Rieumes, a "providential absence," during which, perhaps, "the danger might be averted." This letter bore no signature, but the hand-writing was easily recognisable.

"There's no mistake about it," muttered M. Loyal-Francœur after



having minutely compared the three letters with the first, "there's no mistake about it, that rascal of a Vothier was a regular artist in his line. I defy all the experts of the Palace of Justice—from Monsieur Delarne who is employed by the Bank, to those of the Court of Judicature—Bertin, Belhomme, Violle and Gobert—to find in these letters one point, one stroke of the pen distinguishing them from the true one. It's beautiful! it's perfect! what a pity the fool got found out. This hand will lose its cunning on the Ile des Pins. After all, things are better so, perhaps. At least I've no fear of his taking it into his head to betray me."

"You worry too much, pet," murmured Madame Honoré. "You'll make yourself ill, for certain."

"Ah! but look at the game I'm playing," replied Monsieur Loyal with enthusiasm—with which the contents of the bottles was not wholly unconnected. "I'm tired of those two-penny cases which cause no end of bother and bring in just enough to make both ends meet. Why, in the Le Breton separation case, which lasted six months, in which I was almost assassinated, and in connection with which they wanted to put the police on my track, I hardly netted ten thousand francs. Again, for having the little duchess watched, for inventing the private room business, for having furnished undeniable evidence of her adultery, I got two thousand five hundred francs, all told; I was all but being out of pocket by it. In these days people are meaner every man than his neighbour. They want you to get them out of trouble and then be content with bare thanks. I've got a mine, I mean to work it. Thistime it's a question of the nice little sum of half a million francs."

"Half a million!" cried the fat woman, whom this remark had caused to prick up her ears.

"At the very least; so don't disturb me. I'm getting near the end. Just have a nap. You will wake up a rich woman, perhaps."

Madame Honoré got up, took the bottle of cognac and poured herself out a stiff glass. Then she sank down in her chair again, took the horrible pug on her knee and became immersed in a thrilling novelette. M. Loyal-Francœur fastened the four letters up together and proceeded with the examination of the following document:

#### FRENCH REPUBLIC.

*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,*

PREFECTURE of the DEPARTMENT of the SEINE,

*Extracts from the minutes of certificates of births in the Fourth Division of Paris.*

M. Loyal-Francœur began to run through it. "Year one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four, on this evening, at five o'clock, appeared before us—Registrar, Philippine-Honoré Broussel, midwife, living in Paris, No. 19 Rue Taille-Pain; the same brought to us a male child, born this day, at her house, at 11 a.m. The father, Victor Borin, aged twenty-nine, by profession a clerk, mother unknown (Madame Broussel declining, according to professional etiquette, to give her name), to which child was given the name of Jean Marie Victor."

"Splendid!" interrupted M. Loyal, "Mademoiselle de Rieumes' two names, and that of papa."

He continued. "Which said declaration and presentation were made in the presence of Jacques Nicolas Tourneur, aged fifty, commissionaire

by profession, and Charles-August Barnier, aged thirty-seven, lawyer by profession, both dwelling in this town ; which said witnesses, together with the said Philippine-Honoré Broussel and the said Victor Borin, father of the child, signed this document, it having been previously read to them. Signed :

"Philippine-Honoré Broussel, Victor Borin, A. Barnier, Jacques Tourneur. Faithfully copied, etc., etc.—Registrar. Duly authorised, etc., etc."

To this document were attached two small printed slips, on separate paper. These were two declarations of the birth of the child Jean-Marie-Victor Borin. The papers were quite regular, good in law, provided with all the necessary authentications and stamps. A legal forgery ! What a terrible thing is this facility which the law gives of having a child registered exactly as one thinks fit. In order to procure a duplicate for a torn or lost pawn-ticket, one must bring forward two known witnesses, householders, licensed to carry on some business. In order to obtain a letter from the *post restante* or cash a money-order, one must furnish proofs of identity. But in order to give a child the name which he will bear all his life, two individuals picked up in the street are sufficient. With the complicity of an unscrupulous doctor or interested midwife it is the easiest thing in the world to manufacture a fancy identity, and, as the witnesses never appear again, as the forgers never betray themselves, the consequences of this administrative negligence may be very far-reaching. There is nothing to prevent a practical joker from thus manufacturing sham Montmorencys or La Rochefoncaults. It is true the law has provided for this case. The family whose name is thus usurped has the right to protest. But then it is important that they should know in time, before the intruder has compromised it. And even then, the claim necessitates a lawsuit, a lawsuit which lasts for years. A lawsuit during the course of which all one's secrets are revealed, those which exist and those that are invented, a lawsuit in which the lawyers drag the disputed name in the mud and soil it to such a point that, finally, he to whom the tribunal awards it, dare not pick it up and bear it. One can play fast and loose with the interpretation of the law, and Loyal-Francœur knew this well, being one of those who make it their own life and the death of others. Accordingly, Madame Honoré Broussel's faithful friend took infinite pleasure in the examination of these documents—all authentic and consequently valid.

"Perfect ! admirable !" repeated M. Loyal, the perusal terminated. "The thing is so natural, so simple : M. Victor Borin makes a proposal to Mademoiselle Jeanne de Rieumes, the latter does the haughty at first, then yields, *vide* letters. Meetings take place. The young lady discovers all at once that a little accident has happened. Ha, ha ! she pretends to take a journey—we shall prove it—and she comes to Madame Broussel, a discreet and prudent midwife, who takes upon herself the task of registering the child. But if the young mother has an interest in concealing her identity, it is quite otherwise with the father. He interferes, he recognises the child. What child ? That referred to in the letters. No, not a bit of doubt, it is evident, evident to the whole world. Splendid combination, sublime idea !"

"Shall you be much longer, dear ?" asked Madame Honoré, looking over the top of her nolette.

"Leave me alone. Let me see, where was I ?"

"You were saying that it was evident to the whole world."

"Ah ! then you were listening to me ?"

"Certainly, I saw that you were getting excited ; that made me uneasy,

because, when you do that, it makes you ill; shall I mix you some grog?"

M. Loyal-Francœur gave a smile of supercilious pity. "To think that I have associated my life with that thing," he murmured. "To think that I am going to make that vulgar old woman a millionaire's wife."

"What do you say, ducky?" asked Madame Broussel again, "just a little *kirsch* grog, eh? It's like velvet this weather."

"As you please," said M. Loyal, rather touched by this mark of attention; then, taking up the thread of his ideas, he began again:

"It was a good stroke of luck to fall in with this original and chivalrous count. He has done two-thirds of my work. I saw them yesterday, him and the painter. They looked furious. The chivalrous count thought he was fulfilling a duty, and told the other man everything. If they still retained the slightest doubt, the girl's disappearance would complete their edification. Finally, in case of need, I could send them this document by the proper party. But I sha'n't need to do that. The marriage is broken off, irrevocably broken off, so I shall only have to present myself at the *princess's* to take the "pieces." Two hundred thousand francs, that's good. It's true that I've had trouble, responsibility, and expense. But never mind—"

Madame Honoré had mixed the grog. In spite of his careless air, M. Loyal-Francœur sipped his with unction. Then he continued his monologue:

"Now, we have the girl disgraced; I shall have her taken back to the paternal dwelling by Victor—the father of her child. If he is artful he has a good thing in hand; the old colonel should act according to principle; he will bestow on him the hand of the deserted beauty and five hundred thousand francs. Ha, ha! I don't think he could do less than give me half, when I think that it only rests with me to clap him in prison, and I'm going to make a wealthy citizen of him. That will give me, at the very least, an income of ten thousand francs."

"Still at work, darling?" asked Madame Broussel. "I shall have a nap, then."

"Sleep, my dear, sleep," said M. Loyal paternally, getting up to imprint a kiss on his companion's bloated, bearded face.

"Two and two make four," continued the agent, sitting down again. "Then there's the settlement with the 'princess.'"

He put his hand in his side-pocket and took out a pocket-book.

"This pocket-book must be very important, for its capture to have necessitated the death of a man," said he, becoming serious. "Now, the pocket-book for the sake of which we had the man killed, is in my possession, so it is with me that the reckoning will have to be made. Is five hundred thousand francs too much for an article which warrants a murder? No, certainly not. And, besides, the little lady is rich enough to make this sacrifice. Therefore, four and five, nine—nine hundred thousand francs shall I make out of this affair. It's a pity I can't make a million of it. But, there! with what I've got put by, and a few little scrapings. A million! a million! mine, and without risk! For I defy them to bring it home to me," clicking his thumb-nail against his book. "What shall I do when the money is mine?" he continued, reflecting. "I shall start with—for Belgium or Italy."

A sonorous snore from Madame Broussel interrupted him.

"There!" said he, "hark at her snoring.—Shall I take her? She is very devoted, but she's old, and, with my money, I could get a prettier one,

and a younger one—who knows? Perhaps I might make a good match.” Madame Honoré continued to snore.

“I should be a fool, after all, to burden myself with the old woman. She can’t say anything. Isn’t she the principal accomplice? I’ve got a future before me. I certainly sha’n’t leave France. I shall buy an estate in the country, I shall become popular. I shall get myself elected municipal councillor, general councillor, deputy—M. Loyal-Francœur, deputy! Who knows, with a little cleverness—There are ministers who are not worth as much as I am!”

A violent ring interrupted M. Loyal-Francœur’s dreams of greatness. Madame Honoré, waking with a start, sprang from her chair. Marquis, the pug, burst into a furious barking. M. Loyal hastily collected all his papers and placed them in his pocket.

“Go and open the door, pet,” said he in a low voice.

He disappeared into the kitchen. The midwife went grumbling to draw the bolts. She saw the pale face and lean figure of the little hump-backed clerk.

#### XIV.

##### HOW THE BEST COMBINATIONS ARE FOILED.

“BEAST! brute!” cried Madame Honoré furiously, “it’s you ringing like that?”

“Master here?” asked the hump-back, without troubling himself at the fat woman’s insults. This was nothing to what the poor fellow had to put up with.

“You know well that he has forbidden you to come and disturb him here, Mayeux! What do you want with your master?”

“It’s important business.”

“Come in, then, humpty! you’ll get a warm reception, dromedary! come in, and quick about it.”

With his usual tranquillity, although his pale face had contracted somewhat beneath this flood of insults, expressly chosen, and reflecting on his infirmity, the clerk advanced to the table and stood there waiting until his master condescended to put in an appearance.

“Well, what’s the matter?” said M. Loyal-Francœur, entering, having heard the whole conversation from the kitchen. “What’s going on at the office?”

“The gentleman who came the other day, the count, you know—”

“Well?”

“Has been twice. He says it’s important and he must speak to you.”

“You should have told him to wait.”

“He would not.”

“All right. Off you go, I’ll follow you. Here, Zidore, have a glass.” The hump-back’s eyes glistened beneath his half-closed lids. The inquiry-agent took the bottle of cognac, uncorked it and held the mouth towards his own glass. But just at the moment of pouring out he changed his mind.

“Ah! no” said he, “that’s my glass.”

“I’m not afraid to drink after you, sir.”

“It isn’t that, but you would be able to read my thoughts. Ducky, a clean glass, my pet.”

Ducky got up, and casting an irritated glance on the clerk took a glass from a cupboard, and threw, rather than placed it, on the table ; then she sat down without a word.

"She doesn't spoil you much, my poor Zidore," said M. Loyal, laughing. "But that's nothing, she loves you just the same, at heart. You love him at heart, don't you, darling ?"

"It wouldn't do to have such a monster here, if I have boarders ; he might do them some harm."

"That's good ! Now then, youngster, swallow it up and be off."

The hump-back took the half-filled glass. His hand trembled. He looked for a moment at the transparent, golden liquid ; then, as if a spring within him had been suddenly touched, he threw it somehow into his mouth and swallowed it at one gulp. A scarlet patch mounted to his pale cheeks, he shuddered slightly.

"It's good, good, good," he muttered.

"And now, sling your hook !" cried M. Loyal, opening the door. Isidore started at a run. M. Loyal-Francœur, after having imprinted a solemn kiss on Madame Honoré Broussel's blotchy face, quietly followed him. The Comte de Pringy was impatiently waiting in the court-yard of No. 13. The little clerk appeared to him like a delivering angel.

"Here you are at last !" said he.

"Yes, be good enough to step up, the master should be waiting there for you."

"Nonsense ! how could he have got in ?"

"Oh ! there's a private entrance."

"So there is—Rue Chanoinesse. I read it on the prospectus, but I had forgotten it. Then I'll go up to him ?"

"Yes."

The little hump-back run up the stone steps with such feverish rapidity that the count had a difficulty in following him. They arrived at the entrance door and walked into the waiting-room. There the clerk stopped Pringy. He went to his desk and rung. Then he held his ear to the slit through which the letters were usually passed. After waiting a moment he came back to Pringy.

"He's not ready yet," he whispered in his ear.

"What do you mean, 'ready' ?"

"Not so loud. You're a good man, you are. I'll explain it to you."

"Bft—"

"Hush ! he's moving. We'll meet again, if you like. I shall have something to tell you."

"Speak then ; how much will that cost ?"

"Hush, hush ! he's opening the door."

It was true. At the door Pringy saw the same old fellow in the white wig, large goggles and flowered dressing-gown.

"Welcome, M. le comte, my dear client !" said M. Loyal-Francœur in a cracked voice,

Pringy looked at the little clerk. But, bending over his desk, the latter was copying with ardour and did not seem to notice what was going on.

"There's some mystery about this that the little hump-back will reveal to me," said the count to himself. "I must wait."

He entered the inquiry-agent's private room. The latter went and took his seat behind the bureau, blew his nose, coughed, and said :

"Well, M. le comte, what did I tell you? You are soon back here again, you see."

"Some terrible things have happened since my last visit," replied the count.

"Indeed! Have you any fault to find with me? I think I only told you the simple truth—"

"Yes, but this simple truth has caused some terrible catastrophes."

"Impossible."

"Paul Clairac's marriage with Mademoiselle de Rieumes is broken off."

"I prepared you for that. There's nothing astonishing in it, for, you see—"

"Mademoiselle de Rieumes has disappeared," continued the count, without paying any attention to the inquiry-agent's reflections.

"Indeed! where can she have gone?"

"That is what I shall have to ask you presently. But that is not all. Paul Clairac attributed all his business to me and I have fought him."

"Fought him! What do you mean?" cried the inquiry agent, whose face suddenly became overclouded.

"That we fought a duel this morning, a duel in which I badly wounded, perhaps killed, my best friend."

"Wounded! killed! Paul Clairac!" screamed M. Loyal-Francœur, leaping up. "What do you say? It's impossible!"

"Unfortunately it is not."

"You've killed Clairac, you?"

"I'm afraid so."

"But all would be ruined, I should have nothing left, there would be nothing for it but to pack up my traps—"

"How so? How does that affect you?"

"That affects me," continued Loyal-Francœur, who had recovered his calmness, "in this way, that you would certainly attribute the misfortune to me and would bear me an animosity which I do not deserve."

"And yet you have been the cause of it all."

"I! come, come, my dear sir. What have I done? Nothing. You asked me for some information, and I gave it you—according to tariff. It was for you to keep it to yourself or make use of it at your own risk and peril. If, thanks to this information—quite correct was it not?—you opened the campaign, made a mess of things, caused misfortunes, killed people, is that my look out? Certainly not."

"And yet, if you had not told me anything—"

"I told you the facts; I did not tell you what to do."

"So be it; but, as things stand now, what is your advice?"

"My advice. Nothing. It's no business of mine."

"What has become of Mademoiselle de Rieumes?"

"I know nothing about it."

"Then what is the good of the promises on your prospectus?"

"Oh! let us understand one another. If you ask me—just for curiosity—where Mademoiselle de Rieumes has gone, fleeing the scandal which you created—for it was you who created this scandal M. le comte; for my part, I wash my hands absolutely of it—if you ask me that out of curiosity—"

"Well?"

"Well, I should tell you that it was not my business. If, on the contrary, you come as a client—"

"I come, of course, as a client. Look here, for the last two days I have

felt that I am in mischief, I have involuntarily done wrong, I must make amends for it."

"You have a great soul. Then, you would like—?"

"To know where Mademoiselle de Rieumes is."

"And how much would you pay for that?"

"You know then?" cried Pringy, springing up.

M. Loyal pushed his seat back a little and stretched out his hand towards one of the drawers of his bureau, as if he knew that this drawer contained a means of defence.

"I? I know nothing," said he, fixing his eye on the count.

"But then—" said Pringy, sitting down again.

"My dear sir," said the inquiry-agent, in a crushing tone, "don't forget this. I sell information, advice, and inquiries. There are things that I can provide on the spot, like what I told you the day before yesterday. There are others that I can only provide by a certain date. What you ask me to-day comes under the latter heading."

"Well, when shall you know?"

"Ah! I can't tell you. That will depend on the difficulties, and—the price. How much will you give for it?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I'd willingly go as far as a thousand francs."

M. Loyal-Franceur laughed drily.

"A thousand francs!" he cried, "ha, ha, ha! you would really make that effort? But, my dear sir, I myself should give that to each of the agents that I set to work."

"How much would you want, then?" said the count, taken aback.

"What do you put Colonel de Rieumes' fortune at?" asked the inquiry-agent, replying to one question by another.

"I don't know; about a million, perhaps."

"Very well, his daughter is well worth half his fortune."

"Five hundred thousand francs!"

"Exactly. And, between you and me, it would not be paying too much.

"This is folly!"

"Well, my dear sir, go to the police. They won't ask anything, they won't."

"But if the colonel consented, what guarantee would there be?"

"Look here, I'll make a reasonable proposal. For one hundred thousand francs down, I'll begin the investigations; upon a promise of two hundred thousand francs if successful, I will produce the girl within a week."

"How will you manage it?"

"I don't know, and that's not your business. Hold; will you have still better terms? Not a sou in advance, but a regular engagement, a conditional engagement, and I will start."

"I will go and see M. de Rieumes."

"Go and try to persuade him."

Loyal-Franceur rang and Pringy went out, this time through the room by which he had entered. As he was going the hump-back coughed and looked at him with a smile of intelligence.

"What does this poor devil want with me?" thought Pringy. "After all, he is grateful. Perhaps he'll do me a service. It's a good thing to have a friend at court."

As for Loyal-Franceur, he rubbed his hands.

## XV

IN WHICH M. LOYAL-FRANÇOÛR'S STAR IS MORE AND MORE ON THE DECLINE.

PRINGY descended the stairs in deep thought. He thought of the enormous sum which the inquiry-agent had asked for undertaking the search for Jeanne. Although firmly convinced of Mademoiselle de Rieumes' guilt, he had suffered too much since the day before, firstly at Paul's grief, for he bore him a sincere affection, secondly at the necessity which had forced him to cross swords with him, and, in order to defend his own life, to wound him severely—he had suffered too much from all this not to be anxious, after due reflection, to make amends for his fault. Sincerely he regretted what he had done. Indignant at the girl's perfidy, he had not been able to resist the desire to unmask her. He asked himself now, whether he would not have done better to keep silence. How many couples are there in Paris, at the top as well as the bottom of the social ladder, in whose case the nuptial benediction has been preceded by adventures just as scandalous, and who, thanks to the mystery which reigns on the subject of those adventures, are happy, united, and respected. It would have been the same in this case. What most distressed the count was the blow which would fall on Jeanne's father, the brave Colonel de Rieumes, so loyal, frank and good. Who could have imagined either that this timid-looking girl could thus openly defy propriety? On going to warn Clairac the count had contemplated nothing more than a cold, decorous, and distant rupture, and not the kind of drama which was being played.

"Yes, I must restore Jeanne to her father," said Pringy, as he descended the gloomy staircase; "innocent or guilty, a daughter always holds a place in her father's heart. I am certain that the colonel would give his whole fortune to see her again, if only for an hour. He won't hesitate to accept this man's offer."

But how should he speak to him of it, how start the subject? He had really not the courage to go to her father and say to him: "It was I who broke off your daughter's marriage. It was I who was the cause of her flight. Give me two hundred thousand francs, as her ransom, and I take upon myself to restore her to you." When a man dare not speak he writes. This was the conclusion that the count came to. He wrote a letter to the colonel; took it, for safety's sake, himself, and waited for the answer.

M. Loyal-Françoûr had taken off his wig, his dressing-gown, and his goggles, and had again become the perfect notary whom we know. He walked along the Rue Chanoinesse, crossed the precincts of Notre-Dame, turned up the Rue de Rivoli, and arrived at the Place de la Bastille. There he entered the Vincennes station, and took a ticket for Nogent. Twenty minutes later he was in the forest, and at the little house where he had had Jeanne imprisoned. He knocked; a young man came and opened the door. This young man was the same who had assured Mademoiselle de Rieumes that she had nothing to fear, the same one whom we saw in the Rue Saint-Jacques; it was Victor Borin.

"Good-day, Victor, good-day, my lad," said M. Loyal, entering the little cottage. "Well, how goes it?"

"Badly."



"How, badly? The visitor—?"

"She escaped in the night."

"Escaped!" cried M. Loyal, whose dry voice betokened the greatest grief. "Escaped! impossible, you're joking!"

"There's no doubt about it."

"Then you hadn't shut her in? You hadn't padlocked the windows?"

"She broke the padlocks, and jumped."

"From the first floor?"

"From the first floor."

M. Loyal-Franceur flew, rather than ran, up to the first floor. He saw the bed untouched, the padlock broken, and, hanging to the window fastener, a cord of woollen stuff, which had served as a means of escape. He became scarlet.

"Ah! the jade! the hussy!" he cried, in a voice choked with rage "she has ruined me, it's disgraceful! A thing for which I had made so many sacrifices—! But, no, I won't let her sneak off like this. I must catch her again, and I will!"

A prey to frantic rage, the inquiry-agent strode up and down the room. He, so sly, so calm, so cold as a rule, was beside himself. He had been wounded in the only vulnerable part of his base and venal person—money. He walked up and down, like a hyena in a cage, maddening himself at the flood of thoughts and schemes which crowded upon his brain. Victor was silent, patiently awaiting the end of the crisis. As always happens in such cases, M. Loyal-Franceur felt the need of wreaking his anger on someone. It was the young man who received the storm on his head.

"You didn't keep a sharp look-out on her, eh? What were you doing all night, lazy-bones, good-for-nothing, not to hear the noise she made escaping? Asleep, eh, idiot? you were asleep, or rather, no, you had an understanding with her. Yes, you had an understanding. Wretch, dog, thief!"

He paced up and down like a madman. The young man looked at him with an expression in which scorn was mingled with indignation.

"Ah! I ought to have known you from the first, vile scum!" continued M. Loyal, in a paroxysm of rage. "I ought to have seen that you were not all above board. A bad lot for whom I was making a splendid position. Stupid fool that I was. I ought to have sent you to rot in prison, and let your mother and sister die of hunger, two hussies that have stolen from me the bread that they have been eating for the last three years." This was too much. The measure was overflowing. As long as it had been a question of himself, Victor had endured reproaches and insults. But, his mother, his sister—!

"Very well, sir," said he, "from to-day forward, you will not have this burden to bear. I can no longer serve you. Let me go and seek elsewhere, for myself and my family, the bread which you sell me so dearly."

"Eh!" cried the inquiry-agent, dumbfounded, "you want to leave me?"

"Certainly."

"And the money that you owe me?"

"My month's salary will be due in a few days. Keep it. I have been enough use to you in other ways to consider myself quits with you."

"But I don't think so, and I shall go to the Public Prosecutor at once."

"Go, then; I would as soon have the thing done with. The bread with which you reproach me, I reproach myself with; it seems to me to be

poisoning the two poor women that I am deceiving. Denounce me, I shall go to prison, but my heart will be free."

"He threatens me, upon my word," said the inquiry-agent, stupified.

"Yes, I threaten, I rebel against the indignity to which you subject me, and, when I have spoken, you, too, will have to explain why you have adjourned your denunciation for the last three years, why you have accorded me your confidence, me, who am, as you say, a thief and a forger. You live by scandal. I have been taught in your school; I will make a scandal, too!"

M. Loyal-Franceur was choking. Never would he have imagined such a thing. Victor, the poor and humble youth, whom he thought he had so completely in his power, he rebelled and threatened in his turn. His threats he did not fear, but they might ruin his plot, which, in spite of the check he had met with, he was determined not to abandon.

"Come, you ungrateful fellow," said he, suddenly changing his tone and putting on that benignant air that had so captivated Madame Borin; "come, don't let us fall out. You know well that at heart I'm fond of you, that I love you, upon my word. Let us forget what has passed. Let us put our heads together and take measures against the misfortune that has happened to us."

But Victor shook his head. "No, sir," he replied firmly, "I have told you that I prefer the real prison to the moral one into which you have plunged me. Continue your way of life. All that I can promise you is, not to interfere with you, and even that is a sin that I shall have on my conscience. But as to having any connection with you in future, don't dream of it. My mother and sisters will suffer hunger, perhaps, but at least the little that I shall be able to give them will be honestly earned."

"Very well, be it so, my dear Victor, let us part good friends. I wished your happiness, you repulse me. Good-bye, I will give you your month's salary without ill-feeling and wish you good luck."

But Victor rose, took his hat and walked out without taking the hand which his late master held out to him.

"You're getting a nuisance, my lad," muttered M. Loyal. "I wouldn't give much for your carcase. It's not a gnat like you that would impede Loyal-Franceur!"

He looked after Victor, who was walking rapidly away, and soon saw him disappear round a corner in one of the forest roads.

"He's right, perhaps, after all," he sighed. "If this cursed jade has escaped, she will naturally lodge an information, 'raise hell,' bring here about my ears, to the house where she has partaken of my hospitality, a crowd of myrmidons of the law. It will be better not to loiter here. Yet there are certain precautions to be taken."

He locked the door on the inside, went up to the first-floor and took from the window the padlock, which was, in fact, broken.

"How did that doll twist this iron?" he muttered. "They do sell some trash nowadays. Honesty in commerce is a lost tradition."

He opened the shutter and measured with his eye the height from the ground.

"And jump from the first-floor! Why, she must be an acrobat, this young lady from the Faubourg Saint-Germain! True, they teach them gymnastics now. In any case, there are some foot-marks that must be effaced."

He examined every corner of the room, made certain that there was no

thing left that would betray a woman's presence and consequently serve as evidence; then he closed the shutters, windows, doors, passed his foot several times over the earth on to which Jeanne had jumped, and, key in pocket, he walked through the forest to catch the train at Vincennes. In spite of the cold, he travelled outside. In this way he made certain of not having any inquisitive neighbours. During the journey he examined his position.

"Well, what then?" he said to himself. "Who carried out the abduction? Whom did she see? Not me. She can only inform against Victor. Therefore, I have nothing to fear. The more so that I am able, by documents, to prove that they knew one another and that he had a reason—a right, almost—to carry her off. Let them touch me. I'll raise scandal enough."

He interrupted himself. The train had stopped at Saint-Mandé and two policemen got up outside where Loyal-Francœur had seated himself. A shudder ran through him.

"Had they come up for him? Was he already betrayed?"

The policemen, enveloped in their cloaks, took out their pipes and began to smoke and talk over their private affairs. The inquiry-agent felt safe again.

"No matter," said he, "I have still a first-rate string to my bow: Princess Dolores; with the money I can get out of her, both for services rendered and for—certain documents, I have enough to make up for my losses. Then, by Jove! for the sake of quiet, I'll quit my ungrateful country for a few days. Come, let's go and see the princess—"

The train entered the station. M. Loyal gave up his ticket, took a cab, and drove to the Avenue Montaigne, to the door of a coquettish-looking house. The house was shut. He rang, however, and the carriage door was opened in answer. One of those majestic functionaries who nowadays spurn the name of doorkeeper appeared at the door of the building which served as a lodge.

"What is it?" he asked, in a voice as supercilious as important.

"Could I present my respects to Madame Wilson?" asked M. Loyal-Francœur, humbly.

"Madame is away."

"For long?"

"I don't know."

"And where has she gone, please?"

"I didn't ask her."

"Thank you, sir," said the inquiry-agent, making a fresh bow to the majestic doorkeeper, "many thanks."

"Not at all; at your service. Shut the door, please."

M. Loyal shut the door. Once in the street, he stopped and wiped away the sweat that was running down his face.

"The artist wounded, the girl escaped, the princess away!" said he, quite overcome. "All is lost; it's ruin, and the assizes after."

He leant against one of the door-posts to prevent himself from falling. He was livid. His knees trembled.

"Ruined!" he muttered, "ruined! all my advances lost! Ah! The wretches, the dogs! No, I won't be beaten. I am stronger than they. Now the struggle begins, beware! He drew himself up and shook his fist at the house. "And you, the first thief! Have a care for your head! Pretty as it is, M. Deibler would like to dress it in such a way as you

would not like. And now, forward, march! Let him who crosses my path beware!’

## XVI.

### INVESTIGATIONS.

MEANWHILE M. Manuel, the commissary of police for the Saint-X. district, was actively prosecuting his investigations in relation to the identity of the strange body. In spite of the good commissary's desire, he had found it impossible to keep the affair a secret. The various formalities to be observed, the *post mortem* examination, the exposure at the Morgue, the inquiries, had necessitated the intervention of the Treasury and magistrate. But, at M. Manuel's urgent request, the magistrate had authorised him to proceed with his own investigations without having recourse to his superior officer, and the Chief of Police had confined himself to placing two of his men at his disposal. They went to work with the utmost secrecy, avoiding especially reporters, who disclose and distort, and who cause the best plans to come to nothing. This rule was relaxed in the case of one journalist only, viz., Gratien Voiville, by reason of his early services. Even he had been sworn to secrecy, and, moreover, absorbed by his functions as second in the Clairac-Pringy duel, he had not shown up much at the commissary's office.

In spite of his absence, progress had been made. The body had been exposed to the public. Photographs executed by the department had been circulated among the clubs and gambling saloons, and amongst gamblers of every description. Detectives provided with these photographs had scoured Paris, interrogating loose women, the frequenters of The Helder, The American, Hill's, Brébant's Baratte's. Several times people had thought that they recognised him; then, on reflection, they confessed that they had been mistaken. Or else he was identified as a man whom, half-an-hour later, the detectives discovered well and hearty. Things were beginning to look bad.

However, progress, and rapid progress, was being made, and on the day M. Loyal-Francœur, having overcome his temporary despair, had sworn to continue the struggle, M. Manuel, note-book in hand, knocked at the door of the chief of police. The latter, on hearing M. Manuel's name, sprang up with a gleeful air and came to meet the commissary.

"Come along, my dear colleague," said he, holding out both hands to M. Manuel. "I think we shall have something fresh to tell you."

"What? you think so? you don't know what has happened then?"

"Not in the least. You are conducting the inquiry; it is to you that the reports are made. If I had not expected you, I should have sent my two men to you before now. But here you are, sit down and take your note-book; I'll call them."

He rang. An attendant appeared.

"Send Fauvette to me," said the chief of police.

Fauvette is not an alias nor a nickname, it is the real name of one of the best inspectors in the service. An old Zouave, having retained from the regiment boldness, coolness and discipline, Fauvette possesses in addition to these the greatest acuteness and devotion, of which he has given many proofs. It is by him, in company with two comrades, Antheaume, *alias* "Chocolat," that the most important arrests of late years have been accomplished. Although of short stature, and looking rather frail than

robust, he fears nothing, and, armed simply with his staff and rope of good plaited hemp, he will attack the biggest ruffian, even though armed to the teeth with revolvers and knives, like Marquet and Teinen, the Isle-Adam murderers. A moment passed. Fauvette appeared. He bowed to the two magistrates and, standing erect, with his straw hat resting on his thigh, he awaited his chief's questions or orders.

"It's you, Fauvette, who are engaged on the suburban railway case, the strange man?" asked the chief of police.

"Yes, sir; I and Antheaume."

"Have you discovered anything?"

"I believe and hope so."

"Very well. As the commissary of the district is here, make your reports."

"I was just going to write it out, if M. le Commissaire will wait—"

"No, you can do that later on. For the time being, just tell us how far you have got."

"Well," said the detective, obeying this order, "as soon as we got the photographs we went, as monsieur told us, and showed it about at the clubs and gamblers' haunts. But no one appeared to recognise it. The club-waiters, who have all their customers beneath their eye, assured us that they had never seen the man, not even as a guest at dinner. We were beginning to think there was some mistake, when the idea occurred to me to go and consult an old croupier who had more than once done me a service. He has been at Hombourg in his time and knows most of the Baden players. Hardly had he set eyes on the photograph than he cried. '*Sapristi!* yes, I've often seen the man. But there's something disguised about his face. The one I mean had a moustache.' Without losing a moment I pulled out my pencil and asked him, 'Heavy, slight, turned up, pointed? What was it like?' 'Black, pretty full, turned up.' In the twinkling of an eye I had adorned the photograph with a superb pair of curling moustachios. I showed it to my friend the croupier again. 'Ah,' said he, 'that's him; that's the man who, along with two of his countrymen, broke the bank one night. There is no mistake about it, it's him.' Delighted at this discovery I hailed a passing cab and drove the croupier to the Morgue. He looked at the 'corpsed'—Ah! I beg pardon, M. le commissaire; that's a bit of slang escaped me."

"Never mind, go on, go on," said M. Manuel, whom this tale interested prodigiously.

"Well, he looked at the body, and this time there was no need to make any addition to cause it to be recognised."

"And did he tell you his name?" asked the chief of police.

"Yes, sir, he told me several. Wait till I find my notes; I couldn't repeat them from memory."

"Well, now—"

"Pedrillo Moreno de la Concha, Comte de San-Fernando y Galiano," deciphered the detective with difficulty.

"Stop a moment," said the chief of police, smiling.

He took a portfolio which was lying on his desk, opened it and took a blue paper out.

"Here is the telegram that I have received from the commissary at Monaco: 'Man whose photo you send known here; played here two years back, in company with a very pretty woman; called himself Comte Moreno de San-Fernando.'"

"That tallies!" cried the detective.

"Yes, my good Fauvette, that tallies, and that proves once more that you are no fool, and that you are trustworthy," said the chief of police, in a friendly tone, putting the telegram back in its place.

"Well, that's a great point already; we have determined the victim's identity," observed M. Manuel. "It only remains now to find the murderer."

"Which is saying a good deal," said the chief of police, smiling.

"Oh! who knows, M. le Commissaire?" cried Fauvette, whom his chief's praise had made a trifle conceited. "At any rate, I've already made a few investigations, and if you will allow me to tell you what my idea is, sir—"

"Go ahead, Fauvette; we're listening with all our ears."

The chief of police got up, took a cigarette from off the chimney-piece, lit it, and sat down again at his desk, facing Fauvette.

The detective continued: "It isn't such bad business to know the name of the bird already, but we must know where he roosts. I've heard about the Comte de San-Fernando at Baden and Hombourg; but I wasn't told what he did in Paris, and we want to know where he had his quarters in Paris."

"Perfectly reasoned," said the chief of police, puffing his cigarette. "Well?"

"Well, I boldly set to work again at the clubs; for since our man was a count, it was at the clubs that he must be sought."

"Always supposing he was not ruined," observed M. Manuel.

"Oh! sir, a man who had broken a bank!"

"All the more reason that he should be broken himself. Well, go on."

"This time I didn't beat about the bush, I boldly asked for the Comte de San-Fernando. I did not have to go far—"

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the two listeners simultaneously.

"I go to the *Cinq Parties du Monde* Club. 'Count Pedrillo de San-Fernando!' says the steward, 'he's one of our most regular players. He's the man for unlimited!'"

"What do you mean by unlimited?" asked M. Manuel.

"My dear fellow," said the chief of police, "if you don't know, so much the worse for you; it's too long to explain. Let Fauvette continue. Go on, my lad, go on, we're listening."

"Well, sir, I knew then that M. de San-Fernando played at the club. I asked if he was there. 'No, he's not,' says the waiter. 'We haven't seen him for four days, since the celebrated game when the Comte de Pringy was so 'cleaned out.'"

"The Comte de Pringy!" cried the chief of police in astonishment.

"Yes, sir; do you know him?"

"Possibly. But we shall see about that afterwards. Go on, Fauvette; what next?"

"Well, where was I?—ah! 'The Comte de Pringy,' says the waiter, 'there's another that has disappeared, ever since the same day.'"

"Ah! he has disappeared?" said the chief of police.

"It appears so, sir. However, you will see I have made haste to ask where he lived, this count. Boulevard Hausmann, No.—close to the Rue Saint-Georges. I went there—"

"And you saw him?" asked in his turn M. Manuel.

"No, M. le Commissaire. But the doorkeeper, a Lorrainer—to whom

I spoke of Nancy, his native place, where I had been quartered—for I forgot to tell you that the Comte de Pringy is an old soldier, and that accordingly I presented myself provided with my military papers, like a poor devil come to ask for employment—”

“Very good idea, my lad,” said the chief of police, lighting a second cigarette. “And the doorkeeper—?”

“The doorkeeper, when I talked to him about Nancy, was so pleased, that he began to chatter like a magpie. I offered him a glass of wine. At the end of a quarter of an hour he was firmly convinced we were cousins—after the Brittany fashion—he could refuse me nothing—”

“Well, but what did he say?”

“That since a few days back his lodger, ordinarily as punctual as a clock, had grown visibly irregular in his habits.”

“Go on.”

“On Wednesday it appears that the count, after having come home at five in the morning, set off again in a cab at six—”

“Wednesday, why, that’s the day the body was found.”

“Exactly so. But wait. He did not come home all day, and during the evening his servant had a telegram from him saying that he was going on a journey.”

“That’s strange!” cried M. Manuel.

“The stranger, that I have something against this M. de Pringy that I will tell you of directly,” added the chief of police. “But let Fauvette go on.”

“On Wednesday night, M. de Pringy did not come home; he was seen to come in the next day at eleven o’clock, tired, anxious, gloomy—”

“They didn’t know where he had been?”

“Patience, that’s my comrade’s business. For my part, I have done. Well, he came home on Thursday, changed his things, brushed and washed himself, and went off again. He came back at six, completely upset—”

The commissary and the chief of police exchanged glances.

“He had been to see the body at the Morgue,” said the former.

“And that had affected him, naturally.”

“Wait a minute,” continued the detective. “He went to bed early that evening, and got up at five o’clock.”

“With what object?”

“That the Lorrainer could not tell me. Only, this was the first time that such a thing had happened during the five years that the captain has lived in the house; so it looks bad. He was not seen again until the evening, when he was more and more upset.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s all I have to say, sir. But now there’s ‘Chocolat’s’ report.”

The chief of police rang.

“Call Antheaume,” said he to the boy.

Antheaume, *alias* “Chocolat”—by reason of his affection for yellow or chestnut-coloured clothes—is no taller than Fauvette. But he is, like his comrade, bold, trusty, and cunning. When a “job” is entrusted to him, one may be sure that he will move heaven and earth to succeed in it. He was wearing a cap and blouse. He bowed, as Fauvette had done, and waited to be questioned.

“You have been making inquiries about the Comte de Pringy?” asked his chief.

“Pardon me, sir, it was Fauvette who began. I simply tried to find out where he had been,” replied Antheaume.

"And you did find out?"

"Certainly."

"Then tell me what you discovered."

"I discovered," said Antheaume, shrugging his shoulders, "that our man was not easy in his mind. On getting out of the cab which had taken him to the eastern station—for it was there that he went—he was so upset that he gave his driver ten francs for a three hours' fare; the driver told an inspector who was on duty there, looking after station loafers—"

"Well?"

"Well, this inspector—our friend Gustave, whom you know well—kept his eye on the count. He saw him rushing about here and there, gesticulating and muttering to himself like a man who has something heavy lying on his conscience, then he saw him buy a dozen papers and throw them away, and at last go off by the three o'clock train."

"Where to?"

"He doesn't know. But it wasn't far, as they told Fauvette that he was back again the next day at eleven o'clock."

"No matter, it's a very odd thing," remarked the commissary.

"More so than you think, my dear colleague," said the chief of police, whose face had become grave again, "and I'll tell you why.—You can go," he added, turning to the detectives.

"Are you satisfied with us?" asked Fauvette.

"Delighted, my lads; as usual, you have done wonders. I shall remember them when the time comes."

Fauvette looked at "Chocolat" and winked, and "Chocolat," opening his mouth to its fullest extent, gave vent to that silent laugh in which Fennimore Cooper makes his Mohicans indulge.

On seeing this double pantomime, M. Manuel could not help laughing.

"What's the matter?" asked the chief. "Oh, those fellows' grimaces. If you lived with them, you would see plenty of that. But there, they're good fellows when you understand them, and the people who look askance at them owe them more than they think. Without my poor lads, Paris would soon be in a pitiable state."

"I quite believe you; but what were you saying just now?"

"Wait a moment."

Fauvette and "Chocolat" had made their bows and gone out. When the door was shut,

"I've already had an information laid against this Comte de Pringy," said the chief of police.

"You don't say so!" cried the commissary, dumbfounded

"You shall see."

## XVII.

### THE PLOT THICKENS.

"HARDLY forty-eight hours ago," continued the chief of police, "two gentlemen who had been sent by the Prefect of Police's private secretary called upon me. They came to inform me of an abduction and to ask my assistance to recover the young lady who had been carried off—"

"What has this to do—?"

"Wait a moment. One of these gentlemen was Colonel de Rieumes, a fine old fellow, father of the young girl; the other's name is Paul Clairac; he is a well-known artist, whose works we have seen at the Salon—"



"Yes, I have admired them there," said the commissary.

"Now, it appears that, during the morning, M. le Comte de Pringy, formerly a friend of Paul Clairac's and well known to Colonel de Rieumes, who, years ago, had him under his orders in Africa, made his appearance at the colonel's house in the Rue de Bellechasse, where the artist was breakfasting, asked to see the latter, told him a scandalous story of the young lady and entreated him to break off his engagement—"

"Ah, really, and why?"

"They do not know. But wait. On that same evening the young lady was carried off."

"By whom?"

"By whom? That's the question. Clairac and the colonel are wondering who other than Pringy could have been interested in her disappearance."

"Quite so."

"Now, look at what has passed to-day: the man whose body you have found is a Comte de San Fernando, a foreigner, a Spaniard, American, Brazilian, who knows? a *rastaquouère*, as Fauvette says, a professional gambler. This man played cards on Tuesday evening until very late at the *Cinq Parties du Monde* Club. The Comte de Pringy played and lost to him. You follow me—?"

"Perfectly."

"The next day the gambler's body is found—he has been murdered. And, in order that he shall not be recognised, in order that the murderer's traces shall not easily be found, the body is disguised, clothed in rags, the moustache shaved off—"

"Clever fellow!" said M. Manuel, in spite of himself.

"Very clever, too clever by half; he arranges an admirably organised scene of a suicide. Anyone would have been taken in by it, and you, my dear colleague, your acuteness—"

"Oh, one does one's best," said M. Manuel, blushing a little at this praise.

"No, really. A man wants all his wits about him to escape falling into the trap. I conclude therefore that the murderer was anxious that his victim should not be recognised."

"That is evident."

"Now, on this same day the Comte de Pringy, having lost heavily the evening before, wanders about in an uneasy state of mind. He flies to the station, to escape, no doubt, at the first alarm, with the money which he has taken from his victim. He buys all the papers to see whether anything has been discovered, whether the body has been recognised, whether he is running any risk. Reading nothing dangerous, seeing, on the contrary, thanks to your ingenious artifice, that it is looked upon as a vulgar suicide, he becomes more confident. Nevertheless, he goes off for one night. Where does he go to? Doubtless to confer with his accomplices. He then returns. His friend is going to be married. He breaks off his marriage, carries off the girl, whose fortune he no doubt covets, tries to kill his rival—"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" said the chief of police, interrupting his series of hypotheses.

The porter brought in a letter which he handed to his superior.

"Will you excuse me?" asked the latter.

"Certainly."

He opened the envelope and glanced rapidly over the letter.

"Ah! this is rather too much!" he cried in astonishment.

"What is it?"

"This is the last straw. Read it, my dear fellow, read it. M. de Rieumes has sent it to me."

Monsieur Manuel took the letter and read:

"MY DEAR COLONEL—The step which I am taking will, no doubt, appear to you a strange one. Yet, I entreat you, do not misunderstand me. When I came to your house yesterday, I came to see Paul Clairac for reasons which were imperious and urgent; I could not therefore stay to breakfast, as invited. Paul himself was forced to leave and follow me. It is in the midst of great troubles that I learnt, this morning, of your misfortune, your daughter's disappearance. Certain circumstances give me cause for hope that in two or three days' time I shall know what has become of Made-moiselle de Rieumes. But a large sum of money will be necessary. Feeling certain that you would not hesitate to make a sacrifice, I have promised, in your name, two hundred thousand francs, payable at the moment when your daughter returns home. Was I wrong? Reply immediately. Inquiries are waiting to be set on foot. I am, yours truly, HORACE DE PRINGY."

"Well, what do you say to that?" asked the chief of police.

"It's as clear as day," replied the commissary.

"A gambler, ruined, at the end of his resources, he assassinated his opponent in order to get back his winnings."

"And he broke off his friend Clairac's marriage for some similar reason, which we shall have to find out."

"And finally he carried the girl off."

"And now wants to sell her to papa. Extortion!"

"Extortion! But," continued the chief of police, knitting his brows, "there's one thing that bothers me, I can't quite see the connection—"

"What connection?"

"Between the two things, the abduction and the murder."

"But, my dear colleague, probably there is none. These are two crimes perfectly distinct, although committed by the same person. That's all."

"No, that can't be so," muttered the chief of police. "Two crimes so distinct must have some connecting link. That link I cannot even guess at. Did the murder supply the motive for the abduction? Was it to pave the way for the abduction that the murder was committed? That's what we must discover, otherwise everything else means nothing."

"What! the rest means nothing! You are joking. How about what your men have told you? His anxiety? his journeys? one thing after another. The guilty man—for in my opinion he is guilty—was seen at the station, uneasy, anxious, gesticulating, and it was on the Ceinture, which he must have taken at the East-Ceinture station, that the body was found."

"All very well as far as the murder is concerned, I say; but the abduction?"

"But the visit to the colonel's house?"

"Well?"

"Well, it was to obtain a footing in the place."

"I know that."

"By coming to see Clairac, by talking with him, he obtained a kind of an introduction into the house, a claim on their confidence."

"Quite right."

"And in the evening he probably went again, ostensibly on the part of his friend."

"Evidently."

"The girl followed him unsuspectingly—"

"Granted; but that does not show the point of contact between the two crimes, and it is that point of contact that I want."

"Ah, you go too far, my dear fellow, you must admit that you are over-doing it."

"Everyone to his own idea. According to me, a good police officer finds more with his brain than his eyes. I have seen innocent men loaded with material proofs, and it has happened to me, on reflecting alone during the evening, to collect against a prisoner moral proofs so overwhelming that when on the following day I brought them against him he lost his head and confessed."

"What you say is very curious. So, until you have discovered this connection—"

"I shall reserve my opinion. This connection, look you, is the key of the double crime; it is everything."

"In the meanwhile, I think we shall not do ill to communicate with the magistrate."

"True; he must issue a warrant."

"We will go together, eh?" asked the good M. Manuel, rather uneasily, fearing that with his theories on moral investigation, theories which seemed to him the height of folly, the chief of police would never influence the magistrate and would probably delay the arrest of the culprit.

"*Parbleu!* you know I don't mix myself up much in these affairs; I let everyone do his own part; I have enough to do. If the detectives have finished their report, we will take it. Is it ready, Fauvette?" said he, opening the door and calling out across the office. From his post at the end of the corridor Fauvette heard and showed his intelligent face.

"Here it is, sir."

"Good, my lads. Give me the paper; and now, to the Palais!"

## XVIII.

### THE OFFICIAL INQUIRY.

DELIGHTED at the air of confidence with which M. Loyal-Francœur had promised to make the necessary investigations for finding Jeanne, convinced of the enormous power which this man had at his disposal, Pringy had not the least doubt of the colonel's consent to the proposal which he made to him in his letter. He was expecting, therefore, an answer at any moment, and was absolutely persuaded that this answer would be in the affirmative. The colonel was rich and adored his daughter. What was a sum of two hundred thousand francs to the pleasure of seeing her again? We have seen that M. de Rieumes had thought otherwise, and had simply sent the letter to the chief of police. The count waited, then, and after a hasty dinner at the Golden Lion, close at hand, he went home, so as to be there when the answer arrived. The evening passed, no answer came. The next day, the same silence. The count could not understand it. Could the colonel be hesitating? or was he ill?

"Perhaps," said Pringy to himself, "this terrible blow has affected his mind. At his age, and with his sanguine temperament, there is danger of apoplexy. Or perhaps Jeanne has returned of her own accord, in which case my negotiations would be useless. At any rate this silence is strange."

Night arrived without news. Pringy, more and more astonished, resolved to go and see what was going on at the colonel's house. He rang for Denis to call a cab and began to dress. At that moment the servant knocked and entered the room.

"What is it?" asked the captain.

"A gentleman wishes to speak to you, sir."

"Ah! at last!" cried Pringy, "from the colonel, no doubt. Show him into the drawing-room; I shall be there directly."

He put on his coat and hurried into the drawing-room, where his visitor was waiting. The latter, clothed in black from head to foot, was standing up, with a large portfolio under his arm. He bowed when the count entered.

"M. Horace de Pringy?" he asked.

"The same, sir," said the count, who thought he was in the presence of the colonel's man of business.

"Sir," continued the visitor, "I am charged with a painful mission."

"I think I am acquainted with it," interrupted the count.

"What?"

"Yes, you have come from M. de Rieumes."

"Not exactly, although the De Rieumes affair is not quite unconnected with my visit."

"Speak then, what do you want?" cried Pringy rather impatiently.

"M. le comte, my name is Manuel, and I am a commissary of police. I am charged with placing you under arrest."

"Me!"

"By virtue of a warrant of M. Dauffin, magistrate. Shall I read it to you?"

"But what am I accused of?"

"Of murder, of abduction, of attempted extortion; crimes provided for by articles 296, 297, 354, 355, and following, of the Penal Code, without prejudice of the act of sequestration, provided for and punishable by articles 341, 342—"

"Enough! Spare me this jargon and tell me plainly, and in intelligible language, whom I am accused of having murdered."

"I should be justified, sir, having regard to your attitude, to remain silent, and to summon, to arrest you, the two detectives whom I thought fit, for reasons of propriety, to leave below. But I am not a formalist. I will therefore satisfy your desire, by telling you—what you must know—that you are charged with having murdered one M. Pedrillo, Comte de San-Fernando, in consequence of a quarrel at cards!"

"Pedrillo de San-Fernando! Why, you are joking."

"You were playing cards with him during part of the night."

"As with a dozen other members of the club."

"But you left together."

"Together, no. At the same time possibly. I came to my house, which is close to the club. He drove to the Strasbourg station, to catch the morning train."

"And two hours afterwards he was found dead on the rails,"

"The Eastern?"

"No, the Ceinture. But you are making me say too much, and I am encroaching on the examining magistrate's ground. I have only one thing to say to you. Will you follow me?"

"By all means, sir, but I reserve my defence."

"Of course."

"And the charge of the abduction; what is that?"

"The magistrate will tell you."

"Good! How are you going to take me?"

"I have a cab at the door. There are two detectives in it. For my part, I must make a search here. Do you wish me to do it in your presence?"

"Not the least in the world," said Pringy, who had recovered his self-possession. "Only, don't break anything. I have some knick-knacks here that I value very much as souvenirs."

"Set your mind at ease."

"Then, *au revoir*, M. le commissaire," said Pringy, moving away. But M. Manuel stepped in front of him and went first down the stairs, step by step, until he was opposite the cab in which Fauvette and "Chocolat" were philosophically smoking cigarettes. On seeing the commissary, the two detectives opened the door and got out of the cab.

"Here is M. de Pringy," said M. Manuel, "I entrust him to you."

Pringy bowed to the detectives and got into the cab.

"Shall we put the bracelets on?" asked Antheaume, in a whisper, of his comrade.

"It's not necessary, he's an old officer. Between ourselves, eh, captain?" he added, addressing the count, "you give your word not to escape?"

"My word, my good fellows. I am anxious to prove that a deplorable mistake is being made."

"All right!" as the American pickpockets say when we collar them. Drive on, coachman, to the Préfecture, Quai de l'Horloge."

The cab drove off.

. . . . .

The Quai de l'Horloge is the entrance to the Dépôt. There are two doors, one reserved for prostitutes, who go to the dispensary to have their licences registered; the other, a common one, serving equally for honest folks who come to see the commissary for the Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois district on business of their own, for the detectives whose quarters are on the right of the entrance, for people who wish to enter the building to obtain shooting licences, passports, lost objects, or for all those having law business of any description, and finally for the prison vans which bring to the Dépôt, from Saint-Lazare, Mazas, the Santé and all the different police stations in Paris the prisoners who are to be temporarily lodged there. A strange medley is this Dépôt. Misery and misfortune there elbow vice and crime. It harbours the abandoned infant and the murderer; the vagabond is there side by side with the millionaire arrested for illegal speculations; the pick-pocket meets there the inoffensive loafer who has been "run in" out of the streets by the patrol; the sick and mad are taken there no less than thieves and prostitutes. Runaway cashiers, arrested at the moment of taking their ticket, have encountered there at night the cabman who had driven them, and who had himself been arrested for disorderly conduct. At the Dépôt there exist, as everywhere else, distinctions. In the "blouse room" is all the scum of vagabondage and crime, a vile promiscuity of all that is most filthy in humanity with the

most disgusting vermin; the "black coat room" is cleaner. There are placed those who are not so ragged, and a man may pass a few hours there without being forced to have recourse to insect powder or sulphur baths. Lastly the cells, a luxury relatively enviable, are reserved for important individuals or criminals of mark. It was in a cell that the Comte de Pringy was placed.

What a night, what a horrible night he passed there, lying on a pallet bed, between four walls, no light, deprived of his neckcloth, his braces, and his handkerchief, for fear of suicide; without even a pen-knife, lest he should open a vein; without a penny, for fear he should choke or poison himself by swallowing it. At daybreak the sullen roar in the Dépôt awoke him. Singing, shouting and laughing were going on in the common rooms, and from time to time a loud cry, a name repeated in turn by all the prisoners and all the echoes, traversed the building. A prisoner who was being called, either to be set at liberty, or taken before the magistrate, or jammed into "Black Maria" and transferred to another prison. Towards mid-day the cry was heard, "Pringy! Pringy! Pringy!" and the warder came and opened the door of the cell. An armed guard was waiting outside, holding handcuffs in his hand. When the warder proceeded to adjust this instrument of torture the count gave an involuntary start.

"Only a formality, sir," said the guard.

Determined to bear everything to the end, Pringy held out his arms. But the guard looked at him, saw the red ribbon at his button-hole, examined his frank face, and with an effort: "No, sir," said he, "only, you will not attempt to escape, will you?"

"Upon my word, as an old African soldier, comrade."

"All right, come with me."

They left the Dépôt. They traversed the turnings which the interminable buildings of the wing fronting the Seine form in the interior of the Palais, turned to the left under a doorway and mounted the magistrate's staircase.

## XIX

### THE EXAMINATION.

IN our times, when people have a rage for making of everything a type, one which is as strange as false is made of an examining magistrate. He is represented as a gentleman who is always stiff, formal and solemn—unbending as the law—and never indulging in a smile. Fatal mistake: there are magistrates who are affable, jolly, good-natured, men of the world, pleasure-seeking; not above taking their place at a supper, and able even at an emergency to lead a cotillon. All this does not detract from their judicial qualities—on the contrary. Like the confessor, in order well to perform his duties, the magistrate should have a certain acquaintance with all the vices of society. But there are those who, imbued with old-fashioned ideas, never put off either their white neckcloths or solemn airs. Legal mummies, they are always about to perform a sacrifice, and believe themselves to be above the weaknesses of our poor humanity. Beware of these latter. With them the least peccadillo is a crime, and, like Brid'oison, form, form is their principal rule of conduct, a sacred rule, which they

never fail to act up to. M. Dauffin, the magistrate who had in hand the mysterious affair of the strange body, was precisely one of these men. Tall, thin, solemn, wearing his long grey hair down over his shoulders, his face adorned with a pair of large snow-white whiskers, wearing always a black coat and white neckcloth, M. Dauffin was fully convinced of his perfect infallibility, and when he had given his opinion he would admit no observation or proof to the contrary. In his room everything, like his own person, was methodical. Not one book in the shelves projected beyond its fellows. The cards of reference were arranged as in a shop. And, since "birds of a feather flock together," M. Dauffin had managed to procure a clerk as tall and pedagogic as himself, a clerk who shut his eyes when he spoke, and who, in the intervals between the questions, placed his goose-quill behind his ear—the steel pen was an anti-magisterial innovation which M. Dauffin, and, as a consequence, his clerk, held in the greatest detestation. One last characteristic trait: M. Dauffin likes plain-spoken criminals—such as Jean Hiroux—who confess cynically. He abhors men who deny, and who resort to subterfuges. He is as good-natured and tolerant towards the first as he is severe with the latter. It was before this singular magistrate that Pringy had the misfortune to make his appearance.

When the count, under the escort of the guard, entered M. Dauffin's room, he saw the magistrate seated at his desk, bending over an enormous volume, whilst opposite him, at a table adjoining his chief's desk, the clerk was making his goose-quill fly over the unglazed official paper. At the sound of the door, which the guard closed, the magistrate raised his head and replied with a slight nod to the bow which M. de Pringy made him. He gazed at him for a moment, as if he had hoped to read on his face what was passing in his mind. Then he said laconically, almost roughly:

"Sit down."

The count took a step towards a velvet-covered chair which stood facing the magistrate. But the clerk, stretching out his arm, pointed to a leathern chair on the other side of the room, and, not less sparing of words than his master, pronounced this single word:

"There."

Pringy sat down on his chair. M. Dauffin reflected for a moment, looked at his prisoner again, then said to the soldier who stood in the background, his shako under his arm, straight as a dart, behind his prisoner:

"Guard, go into the corridor."

The soldier left the room. There was a moment's silence. Much agitated, Pringy could not help exclaiming:

"Sir, if you would allow me—"

"Silence!" cried the clerk, throwing a furious glance on the prisoner.

"Have you scheduled all the evidence?" asked the magistrate of his clerk, exactly as if M. de Pringy had not been present.

"They are here, sir."

"And the report of the perquisition?"

"It is here, sir."

"Give them all to me."

The clerk handed a bundle of papers to the magistrate. M. Dauffin glanced at them, placed them on his desk, and, turning to the count:

"What is your name?" he asked. At last the examination had begun.

"Louis-Gaston-Horace de Pringy," replied the count.

"You bear the title of count?"

"I have a right to it, and can furnish proofs—"

"Well, your age?"

"Forty-five."

"Profession?"

"Retired officer. Independent at present."

"Where do you live?"

"Boulevard Haussmann."

"You know with what crimes you are charged?"

"They said something about the murder of a certain Comte de San-Fernando."

"Do you admit having committed this murder?"

The count shrugged his shoulders. "It is ridiculous," he said, "what object should I have in killing this fellow, with whom I have never had the least connection, whom I hardly knew?"

"Prisoner, conduct yourself more respectfully towards the representative of the law. So you deny it. Clerk, write that the prisoner denies. Now, do you deny having had any connection with the victim?"

"That is almost the case; I knew him very little."

"You stand convicted already of a flagrant falsehood. A few hours before the crime you were playing cards together."

"Why, sir, at a club one plays cards often with men only known to one by name, especially when, as Monsieur de San-Fernando did, they take the bank at baccarat."

"Very well. Do you deny also that you lost to him?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I did lose; but whom does that concern?"

"You are not here to ask questions, but to answer. Clerk, write that the prisoner admits having played cards, and lost."

The examination continued after this fashion, Monsieur Dauffin seizing the least hesitation on the count's part, and forging terrible weapons from it. But Pringy stood his ground. To every question he had a reply, and, determined to keep his self-possession, he did not trouble himself at the most delicate questions, nor the most irritating remarks.

"The medical examination has proved that the victim was killed by a revolver bullet of No. 7, calibre," said the magistrate. "Now, in the search made at your house, two revolvers of the same calibre were found, and both the barrels were foul."

"I have a fine collection of weapons, and a short time back I tested all my revolvers at the shooting-gallery. As the victim only received one bullet, I could not, in killing him, have fouled two revolvers."

"No, you might have fired several times, and only hit him once."

"Like platoon firing, I suppose; for since you noticed that the barrel was foul, you may have remarked also that the twelve chambers are equally so; I must therefore have fired twelve shots."

"Besides this, the corpse, which it had been attempted to make unrecognisable, had had the moustache shaved off. Now, two razors and a lathering-brush, still wet, were found at your house."

"I shave myself every morning. My orderly will tell you as much."

"A witness in your service."

"Granted. But confess, at least, that if my lathering-brush had only been used to shave Monsieur de San-Fernando, it would have had time to dry in four days."

"Do not jest; facetiousness is out of place here. However, we will take leave of the principal charge for to-day, and pass on to the second."

"What? there is a second one?"



"I would remark that your manner of replying and your whole behaviour are not such as to gain you any sympathy."

"Well, with what am I charged still? Tell me that, at least," cried Pringy, whose patience was exhausted.

Monsieur Dauffin looked at his clerk, who raised his eyes to heaven, as if to take it to witness of the scandal which this incredible audacity caused. The clerk, a little uneasy even at the violence with which the prisoner had spoken to his worship, stretched out his hand towards the bell, in order to summon the guard. Monsieur Dauffin stopped him with a gesture, then, turning towards Pringy :

"Independently of the crime of murder, provided for and punishable by articles 296, and following, of the Penal Code," he said in an emphatic tone, "you are, in addition, charged with abduction and unlawful detention; crimes provided for and punishable, by articles 341, 354, and following, of the same code."

"Abduction, and unlawful detention?"

"Of Mademoiselle Jeanne de Rieumes."

"And who accuses me?"

"The father, who has lodged an information. Therefore, be good enough to answer the questions which I am about to put to you on this subject. We shall afterwards take the subsidiary charge—attempted extortion."

"What! extortion, now!"

"Established by the letter which you wrote to the father, proposing to him to restore his daughter, in consideration of a sum of two hundred thousand francs. Clerk, show the letter to the accused; it is necessary that he should say whether he recognises it."

"Perfectly, sir; most certainly I wrote that letter."

"Then you plead guilty by implication?"

"I plead guilty to nothing. I know that Colonel de Rieumes, whom I love and respect, has had a heavy blow; that his daughter, for some reason which I am not called upon to explain, has fled—"

"Has been carried off, you mean."

"I speak according to my own opinion, and I say, *has fled*. I have reasons for thinking so, from certain circumstances."

"What circumstances? Make them known to justice."

"No, sir."

"You refuse to reply?"

"Certainly. There are certain things that a gallant man cannot say."

"There is no gallant man here, sir; there is a prisoner who is being interrogated by a magistrate. Will you answer, yes or no?"

"No, a thousand times, no; to tell the truth, these questions bore me, and I shall answer no more of any description."

## XX.

### CONFRONTED.

"We shall see about that," said M. Dauffin, assuming a dignified air.

"And, first of all, do you admit the abduction?"

The count, fixing his eyes on the magistrate, was silent.

"Insolent fellow!" cried the solemn M. Dauffin, really indignant. "So

the case stands thus. Very well; we shall see whether you will be equally arrogant in the presence of your victim's body."

He rang. The guard appeared.

"Take this man back to the Dépôt and tell them to hold him at my disposal," he ordered. "And take care that he does not escape. You will answer to me for it."

"We will go to the Morgue," said the magistrate to his clerk.

If, in many cases, in spite of the preservation of its ancient usages and customs, the law has lost a great part of its *prestige*, there are others in which it recovers it in all its majesty. This is the case in a confrontation at the Morgue. Night had fallen; the gloomy and sinister building, black outside, lighted inside by jets of gas and torches, was arranged for the occasion. In the large hall hung with green, which is situated next to the office, the corpse was laid out on a platform. Right and left two lamps provided with reflectors performed the functions of foot-lights at a theatre and threw a flood of light on the cadaverous and already decomposing body. Opposite, a curtain suspended from a rod concealed from the spectators the corpse and the kind of stage upon which it was placed. To the right and left of this the Public Prosecutor, the magistrate and his clerk, M. Manuel, the commissary, and his secretary, the chief of police, the doctor who had performed the *post mortem* examination, and lastly, the clerk of the Morgue, M. Clovis Pierre, and his assistant, had taken their places. Standing by the green curtain and holding the cord by which it moved was Arthur, the youth whom we saw at the commencement of the inquiry: Arthur, no longer wearing a blouse, but in full dress; frock-coat, bearing the arms of the town, and red waistcoat with silver buttons. The office-door opened. The Comte de Pringy appeared, escorted by the two detectives, Antheaume and Fauvette.

"Do you still persist in denying your crime?" asked the magistrate, in a solemn voice.

"I protest most strongly against the charge," replied the count firmly.

"Very well; look!"

At a given signal the curtain flew back and the corpse appeared. Terrible and fantastic apparition. Beneath the jets of moving light cast by the two reflectors the flabby and discoloured flesh seemed to become re-animated and to move. One would have imagined that the dead man was making efforts to rise, to walk, to speak. Pale, but firm, Pringy looked at it for a moment. Then, averting his eyes, he turned them on the magistrate, as if to provoke some fresh question.

"Do you recognise your victim?" said the implacable magistrate.

"I recognise perfectly M. Pedrillo de San-Fernando," said Pringy, in a firm voice; "but I swear, upon his body, I am innocent of his death."

"Very well, we will continue the inquiry to-morrow," said M. Dauffin, giving a sign.

The prisoner was taken away. The lamps were extinguished. As they left, the chief of police took M. Manuel apart.

"My dear colleague," said he in a whisper, "we have made fools of ourselves. I'll bet my ears that man is innocent!"

## XXI.

## LOST !

As M. Loyal had, to his grief, found out, Jeanne had escaped from the villa at Nogent. A trifle reassured by the conversation that she had had with Victor, and especially by the assurance that she ran no danger, either for her virtue or for her life, she had sat down in a chair and taken a little rest, of which she stood much in need after the violent shock which she had undergone. Towards one o'clock in the morning she awoke. The lamp had gone out and the room was plunged in complete darkness. Jeanne looked out through the interstices of the shutters. All was quiet in the dark night, no sound, no light. She was frightened at this silence; she wondered whether she had been quite abandoned. By a convulsive movement she shook the shutters. The padlocks which secured them rattled. She paused, frightened; would not this noise attract the attention of her persecutors? Nothing moved in the house. Jeanne made another effort and put forth all her strength upon the shutters. She fancied she heard something give way inside the padlock. She redoubled her efforts; the sound was more distinct. Still the same silence in the house. A more violent push caused the padlock to yield altogether. One of the shutters opened and swayed back against the wall. Her keepers must have heard her this time. With palpitating heart she listened. Nothing. Full of hope and courage, she took the cloth from the table, a woollen cloth. She doubled it, in order to give it more strength, fastened it to the bar of the window, then, confiding herself to God, she climbed on to the window-sill, let herself slip down to the end of the cord, and let go. Her feet were hardly fifty inches from the ground. The soil was soft. She was not hurt. Without taking time to look about her, she ran to the garden door. It was locked; but the ivy and virgin vine climbing along the planks of the fence formed a natural ladder. Overcome by joy at the idea of escaping from her persecutors' hands, Jeanne hesitated at no obstacle. She clambered up, clung to the top of the fence and let herself down on the other side in a forest path. She was free! Free, but not yet safe. She knew not where she was. No matter, she must fly, fly before all, leave this dangerous and accursed place with all speed. They might discover her escape, pursue her, recapture her. She must fly. She took at hazard the path which ran past the villa and began to walk rapidly along, without troubling herself to think whither this path would lead her. She soon solved the mystery. The path opened out into a broad road, at the end of which lights twinkled. She walked towards them. The lights were a long way off, but Jeanne, upheld by hope, walked quickly along. Soon she distinctly saw houses and a church. Where was she? She knew not, but by knocking at a door—; she hesitated a moment. At last she saw a light shining through the imperfectly closed shutters of one of the windows. She knocked, no one answered at first. Jeanne bruised her fist against the door; the barking of a dog proved to her that she had been heard. The shutters opened. A hairy face, surmounted by a cotton cap, appeared cautiously.

"Who is there?" asked a rough and alarmed voice.

"I have lost my way; could you shelter me for a few hours?" asked the young girl.

"This is not an inn. Go away," replied the voice, a trifle less frightened. "I entreat you—"

"Go away, I tell you. Did ever anyone see! This is not the time to be wandering about."

"For mercy's sake. Tell me, at least, where I am."

"If you don't go away directly, I'll let my dog out," thundered the voice, "and you'll feel his teeth, hussy!"

Saying this, the man violently closed the window. The poor child, terrified, and not daring to renew elsewhere an attempt so harshly greeted, went her way, groaning. She walked, walked, unceasingly. She arrived presently at a gate which she recognised as one of the new barriers of Paris. A customs' clerk, well wrapped up, was smoking his pipe at the door.

"Excuse me, sir, where am I?" asked Jeanne, who had regained a little confidence at the sight of the official's uniform.

"At the Montreuil gate, my pretty girl."

"Am I far from the Faubourg Saint-Germain?"

The man looked at her to see whether she was speaking seriously. The question appeared to him so strange, that he thought the young girl was joking. Jeanne was wearing an elegant silk dress. But during her escape from the window, her painful climb over the fence, and her fall on the damp ground, this dress had been rumpled, torn, and soiled with mud; besides this, her tramp through the forest had stained her shapely boots; finally, she stood there bare-headed, in the middle of the road, at four o'clock in the morning. All this did not help to gain her much sympathy, and the good exciseman felt satisfied that he had to deal with some street-walker.

"If you want to get there before daybreak," said he, in a bantering voice, "you'd better hurry up; it's a good tramp yet."

The poor child felt fit to sink; however, she asked which road she had to take.

"Straight on," said the man. "You must go as far as the Boulevard Voltaire and go along that. You will come out in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Follow it as far as the Place de la Bastille. Then by the Rue de Rivoli, the Carrousel, and either the Pont des Saint-Pères or the Pont Royal, as you choose."

"Heaven help me!" cried Jeanne, aghast; "I shall never have the strength to go all that way."

"If you like to come into the guard-house," said the man, "some of my comrades won't object to keeping you company."

Without quite understanding the drift of this remark, Jeanne had a suspicion of some fresh peril. Moreover, the word "guard-house" had an unpleasant sound in her ears. She fancied herself surrounded by rough men, foul-mouthed soldiers. Terror seized her anew. She passed the officer and ran along at the top of her speed. The man looked at her running, and an idea struck him.

"It's some jade that's played me a trick. All that gammon was just to put me off the scent. She's got at least ten litres of alcohol stowed away under her petticoats."

He thought of pursuing and searching her. But she was already far off. She was following, still running, the old Grande Rue de Montreuil, now the Rue d'Avron, of which the rough stones made her boots turn over and bruised her feet, but she ran on, on, for in the silence of the night she heard the sound of her own steps multiplied by the echoes, and fancied she was

being pursued. She came to a broad street planted with trees. She stopped for a second. The echo ceased at the same time. The poor child, confused by the hallucinations which floated in her throbbing brain, no longer recollected the directions which had been given her.

"He said a boulevard, the Boulevard Voltaire," she said painfully. "This must be it, I must follow it, follow it to the end."

She was in the Boulevard de Charonne. She set off walking again. The long line of avenues planted with trees stretched away uninterruptedly. After the Boulevard de Charonne comes the Boulevard de Ménilmontant; then that of Belleville, Villette, then there is a bend. Jeanne, worn with fatigue, her feet covered with blood, frozen with the cold and bathed in perspiration, walked on, on. She reeled at every step, her failing legs gave way under her; but, gathering all her strength, she continued her mad career. At the Villette-circus she sat down for a moment on a bench in front of the tramways' office. But two drunken men who came up at that moment, quarrelling between themselves, forced her to move on again at once. She traversed the whole length of the Boulevard de la Chapelle and entered that of Rochechouart. There, opposite the Elysée-Montmartre, she felt her head swim, thousands of lights sparkled in her eyes, she uttered a loud shriek, and sank to the ground. She remained there a few moments. Then the coolness of the night air brought her to her senses again. She made an effort to rise. Impossible. Her limbs were cramped. Each attempt gave her horrible pain. And no one, not a soul, to help her.

"My God!" she murmured, in an earnest prayer which came from her innermost heart, "my God! have pity on me."

As if God had answered her prayer on the spot, a clear youthful voice rang out suddenly in the distance.

## XXII.

### RESCUE.

THE voice sang :

"In the chilly night and drear,  
Rag-picker of Paris, pray,  
Lamp in hand, why dost thou peer  
Through yon heaps of rubbish? Say!  
Rags! Thy harvest's yield is rags,  
Hook them out and cram thy poke.  
Ah! *thy* business never flags,  
All things go to swell thy stock,  
All things in the end *are* rags."

"Help!" cried Jeanne, raising herself upon her elbow, so that her appeal might be better heard. She saw the gathering light of the lantern which the singer carried. It was coming along the Rue des Martyrs. The voice continued :

"Once in a common cause  
All Europe set on France.  
What was it gave them pause  
And checked the foe's advance!  
Rags and tatters; it was but a rag!  
That rag which a Frenchman will ever adore.  
Tatters and rags, but a noble rag  
If it be tricolour.  
Hurrah, boys, for that glorious rag!"

"Help! help!" cried Jeanne.

She tried to wave her arm in the air in order to attract attention. But the double effort that she had just made to cry out and raise herself as high as possible had exhausted her strength. She sank to the ground, uttering a groan. The rag-picker—for this unexpected rescuer was none other than a rag-picker on his rounds—had nevertheless heard her. He looked about him for a moment, trying to discover from whence the cries which had reached his ear proceeded, turning the reflector of his lantern, and throwing a beam of light in every direction. In the midst of the dullness which had taken possession of her brain Jeanne divined rather than saw these proceedings. But she was past helping herself. Dimness overspread her eyes. Her head felt as if crushed in a vice, she lost consciousness. At this moment the rag-picker perceived her. He ran up and saw a woman in the icy mud.

"Well, my little woman," said he, giving her a slight push with the end of his hook, "what's the matter? Having a doss in the gutter?"

Then, stooping down, and noticing the pallor which overspread the young girl's face: "She can't hear me," he continued. "*Sapristi!* is she dead? Now, Martin, my lad, down with your *cashmere* and bear a hand."

He threw down his basket, which was almost full, went down on his knees and placed his hand on Jeanne's heart.

"No, her heart's beating still. *Sapristi!* a fine outside! she's one of the upper ten, or else a gay lady. Oh, well, no matter, whoever she is, I won't let her die like this!"

Taking the girl's inert body in his arms, he placed her on the edge of the pavement, leant her back against his basket, and slapped her hands. She made no movement.

"If I go on like this, I shall break her poor little hands in my great paws," muttered the kind fellow, noting the fruitlessness of his efforts. "If all the houses weren't shut up, I'd give her a little brandy; that would bring her to, p'raps. It's just when you want help most that you can't find a soul. Devil take it!"

And, in truth, as far as the eye could reach, the street was deserted.

"Not a cat!" he continued. "And on a cold night like this, she might die on my hands."

In the utmost despair he beat his head with his hands. He was a right good fellow, was Martin, *alias* "The Bear," rag-picker by trade and profession, born in, and obstinately inhabiting, the Cité Maupy, Montmartre. He had only left his dear Cité for five years, his five years of military service. The tax of blood once paid, Martin had without regret exchanged his knapsack and rifle for the "cashmere" (the basket) and the 7 (the hook, on account of its shape), and had resumed his hovel and occupation. He was a man of eight-and-twenty, not tall, but well-knit, broad-shouldered, and very strong. He would not have been bad-looking if the small-pox had not deeply scored a face bronzed by the open air and swarthy from work. His only good remaining feature was his keen eyes, in which were depicted intelligence and good-nature, and which softened down a little the unpleasant impression which his face produced at first glance. Living alone, without wife or mistress, Martin had received from one of his comrades the nickname of "the bear," which went so well with his own name that he had kept it. They say that light proceeds from a shock. The two blows that Martin had given himself on the head caused an idea to enter it.

"A doctor, of course!" he said, "there must be a doctor about here; he's not like the pubs; he'll open."

And, in fact, he found a doctor's close by; he dragged at the night-bell, without, at the same time, losing sight of his protégée. After a short time had elapsed an assistant opened the door. At the sight of the rag-picker, whose appearance was anything but reassuring, he asked: "Who are you?"

"Prosper Martin, otherwise 'the bear,' rag-picker, and I've come to ask you to help me to save a poor girl who is dying, here, close by. There's not a minute to lose."

The assistant plucked up courage. He opened the door wide. "Where is she?" he asked.

"There, against my basket."

"What is the matter with her?"

"How should I know? She's fainted. Wait a minute, I'll go and fetch her. You'll know better than me, it's your trade."

"Shall I go with you?"

"No need for that. She's no heavier than a feather," said the rag-picker, lifting Jeanne in his strong arms and carrying her into the surgery.

"Why, she is dead!" cried the assistant, terrified.

"No, but she's not far off it. If you don't hurry up and find something in your crib to bring her round quick, it's a case for the undertaker."

Horried, the assistant awoke his master. The latter came down half-dressed. "Congestion of the brain," he said, after having examined the patient. "Wait a minute, a mustard poultice on each leg, first of all. Then friction. Ah! the blood is beginning to circulate again. She is saved for the moment. But, my good man, it's only postponed. So I should advise you to—"

"What?"

"To run at once to the station at the Place Dancourt, close to the Théâtre Montmartre, and inform the police."

"What for?"

"To have her taken to the Lariboisière Hospital, of course!"

"To the hospital!" exclaimed "the bear," indignantly. "To the hospital! Go along! Haven't I got a place of my own? And don't you think she'll be as well cared for there as at your hospital? Yes, yes. Now, Martin, my boy, hand your pickings over to a comrade. Friendship is your task to-day." And, running to his basket, he emptied it out on the pavement, then, placing it on his shoulders, he took Jeanne up in his arms.

"Cabby, the Cité Maupy," he said to himself, smiling; "double fare if you get there in half an hour."

And he went off at the double, in spite of his burden.

### XXIII.

#### THE CITÉ MAUPY.

RECENT events have caused the calculation to be made that very evening at least fifty thousand persons set out, hook in one hand, lantern in the other, basket on back and hope in the heart, to go and rummage among the dust-heaps in search of the wherewithal to support their families. It is the

fashion to despise, to scoff at, to make a joke of the rag-picker. A great mistake, for amongst all the army of toilers this one possesses the great merit of being content with his lot and of never asking for more than tranquillity and the maintenance of things as they exist at present. Having regard to their number, the rag-pickers cause the law but little trouble. No crimes, no thefts, and if one of them is from time to time taken to the police-station, it is only on account of some quarrel between friends, or of having allowed himself to be overcome by some of the poisonous stuff sold to him at the low public houses. It is true, this is not pleasant. Soap is an unknown luxury to him. The fresh air and the water of the Seine are his only cleansers. He is dirty, true again. But go and visit in their work-shops, down mines, or on locomotives, those dandy engineers who have lately posed as lovers at the Vaudeville and Gymnase theatres, you will find them in their shirt sleeves, black, smoky, greasy, and by no means poetic. Cleanse the rag-picker—such a thing happens occasionally—you will find a man worth more than our finest dandies or most fashionable “mashers.”

In Paris, rag-picking, which gives employment to more than sixty thousand souls, has its town in the great city; its “Cités,” as they are called, who have in their aspect peculiarities wholly their own. The improvements in the capital, in replacing huts by palaces, have not destroyed the plebeian haunts; they have only transplanted them. “Little Poland”—the classic and legendary abode of the rag-pickers, of which novel and play have preserved types in *The General*, *Mother Marré*, *Mother Moscou*—has made way for broad and fashionable streets. Little Poland is not dead, or at least, like *Mother Gigogne*, it has given birth to a numerous progeny; the *Cité Jeanne d'Arc*, the *Cité Doré*, in the thirteenth district; the *Ile des Siuges*, in the fifteenth; the *Passage Touzelin*, *De l'Ecole*, *Trébert*, *Saint-Charles*, the *Cité Foucault*, the *Cité du Soleil*, near the fortifications; the *Cité de la Moscowa*, the *Rue Angélique Compoint*, the *Cité Maupy*, at *Montmartre*; the *Butte Elisa-Borey*, *Belleville*; the *Passage du Nord*, the *Passage du Sud*, the *Cité Bender*, at *La Villette*; and a hundred others in the odd nooks of Paris, not to mention *Aubervilliers*, *Clichy*, *Saint-Ouen*, *Gentilly*, *Montrouge*.

It was to one of these cités, the *Cité Maupy*, that Martin made his way, carrying *Mademoiselle de Rieumes* in his arms. Situated in the *Rue Mercadet*, the *Cité Maupy* was at first only a vast tract of waste land, which its position behind the *Buttes Montmartre*, far from all centres of communication, made useless, and, so to speak, deserted. Some rag-pickers went and took up their quarters there, hired the land by the yard, at so much a year, and themselves built their own dwellings. Rudimentary edifices: for the richer ones, one room where the whole family lives, eats and sleeps, and a second room in which to do the sorting of the produce of the baskets. The less fortunate have but one apartment, in which they sleep on their merchandise until an opportunity comes to sell it. The laws of health are certainly not very vigorously enforced, but these poor creatures are not over particular. And then, as they say, “What else can we do?”

To the lover of the picturesque the *Cité Maupy* presents a curious appearance. Ranged in transverse and longitudinal streets, the houses—of which some are hovels in which a peasant would not put his sheep—are carefully numbered. Every style is here represented, from the cottage in old plaster, paving-stones and bricks, held together by clay and mud; from the plank shanty, its interstices stuffed with rags, and its roof of tarred



cardboard; to the camping-out tents, to a superb construction wholly composed of sardine-boxes and grate-registers.

The Cité Maupy has its monuments. On the top of one of the houses, in the middle of the Grande-Rue, is an old bust of Louis Philippe, life size, in uniform, with the grand cordon and epaulettes. Thrown out of some politician's room in 1848, it was picked up by a sceptical rag-picker, who took it home. Further along, in the same street, is another bust, a woman this time, Madame de Sévigné, Marion de l'Orme, or possibly Manon Lescaut, fallen from their splendour into the basket and cast ashore at the Cité Maupy. As the song which Martin the bear sang has it :

"All things in the end *are* rags."

And in the midst of all this, in these streets where a pavement is a myth—they build the houses of the paving-stones—swarms a motley assemblage : little boys and girls, chickens, dogs, geese and cats, living harmoniously together, making pleasure out of the veriest trifles, putting into practice Beranger's adage :

"Beggars, 'tis true,  
Are a jovial crew."

Living by himself, earning an honest livelihood, Prosper Martin treated himself to the luxury of two rooms, in the Rue Gambetta—so the rag-pickers have christened one of their streets. Relatively speaking, his dwelling was luxurious : A clean bed, with sheets and blankets, a table, a chair, whose ragged straw had been patched with an old bed vallance, a looking-glass and a cuckoo-clock, a real cuckoo-clock, which struck the hours. On the walls was a complete museum, a poor man's museum—penny images, chromo-lithographed advertisements which had been distributed in the street, and of which the general appearance rejoiced the eye by its multi-coloured effect. It was thither that he led, or rather carried, Colonel de Rieumes' daughter, picked up by him in the mud of the Boulevard de Rochechouart. He placed her, with all her clothes on, on the bed, arranged her head on the pillow with maternal care, covered her with his heavy cloak, and running out, went and knocked at the door of an adjoining hovel.

"Who's there ?" asked a hoarse voice, the voice of a woman husky from excessive drinking.

"It's me, mother," said the rag-picker, "me, Prosper, the bear."

"What do you want, you rascal? You've been boozing too much, I'll bet. You want somebody to look after you."

"No, mother. It's not for myself ; it's more serious. Come here, I'll tell you."

"Wait a minute, I'll come."

A sound of bolts being drawn was heard ; then a woman appeared. Having been sleeping in her clothes, like the majority of the inhabitants of the cité, she was soon ready. She was a woman of about fifty, of medium height, wearing a fairly clean black dress, enveloped in a shawl, and wearing a flaring red handkerchief on her head. "Mother Comfort"—the only name by which she was known—was a type of the cité. An old *vivandière*, a woman of heart, courage, and experience, she was always doing her friends and neighbours services. Comforting the unhappy, nursing the sick, giving judicial and medical advice where it was needed, she possessed a real authority, which everyone, even "General La Crasse," a former professor,

who had become a rag-picker out of scorn for human folly, tacitly accepted. It was naturally to her that Prosper Martin, in this pressing case, had recourse.

"Well, what is it, my lad?" said Mother Comfort, issuing from her hut. "What's going on? I've only just finished my round, and was beginning to doze when you knocked. I was tired out."

"Something serious has happened, mother, and I want your help and advice."

"You're going to be married, p'raps?"

"Let me tell you. Just fancy, to-night I found a young girl on the outer boulevard, in front of the Elysée-Montmartre."

"Not such a rare thing nowadays."

"Keep quiet, will you. No, not a street-walker. A poor girl of good family, so it seems to me. But unconscious. I took her to a doctor's."

"Well, what did he say?"

"That it was congestion of the brain; he wanted me to take her to the Lariboisière Hospital. Fancy! to the hospital—never! I brought her here."

"Where?"

"To my house, of course!"

"Bravo, lad! And then?"

"And then I came to ask you to lend me a hand to attend to her."

"Bravo again! Be easy, I know more about such things than all the doctors and apothecaries in France and Navarre. I didn't go through the Crimean and Italian wars, with the brave Sixth of the Line—the heroes of Inkermann—without having got some experience. I've nursed and saved more than one poor little child of our great mother France. There, there, if it hadn't been for the major's jealousy, I should have had the military medal, for certain. Well, well, one has the others."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Martin. "But come and see my sick girl."

"No fear, lad. What has to be done will be done. Come, let's have a look at her."

"There she is," said "the bear," opening the door.

"Ah! poor little angel!" cried Mother Comfort, clasping her hands together. "Isn't she pretty! A regular little doll, a baby. And doesn't she shiver! poor little thing. Wait, my pet, I'll cover you up a bit. Great blockhead, you've thrown her down there like a bag of chips!"

In a trice the good woman had lifted up the sides of the scanty mattress, and replaced the pillow, from which the patient's head had slipped.

"Yes, she's an aristocrat," she muttered, looking at the delicate hands and little feet of Mademoiselle de Ricumes, "and a real one. But we *must* have them, you see, lad. If there were no rich folks, there would be no rags, and if there were no rags, the rag-pickers would starve. Those that say the contrary are fools, it's me who tells 'em so."

She unfastened Jeanne's boots. She felt her feet.

"Like ice! I thought so. Of course, that's affected her head. Listen, my lad, run to my house, and on the table at the head of the bed you'll find some mustard plasters, some 'papier Rigollot.' Bring them to me. I'll be undressing her, poor dear soul. But where are you going to sleep?"

"Me, why, on a chair near her!"

"Go and lie down on my bed. Rest easy; that won't trouble my dreams. I've known something in my time, and bigger swells than you, saving offence. Run along, my lad; I'll look after the patient."

"Oh ! thanks, mother, for what you're doing now, see you—" said Prosper Martin, taking the old *vivandière's* hand.

"Go along, you don't want to seduce me !" she cried, laughing. "There, give me a kiss, and go and fetch my '*Rigolos* ;' hurry up."

"Shall we save her ?"

"I can't say. Go along when I tell you."

"I'm going, mother."

"And not too soon."

"But on one condition—that I shall watch her with you when I come back."

"No, my lad, you don't understand that a girl, especially when like this one, she looks like being light-headed, can't be nursed by a man. *Sapristi !* didn't they teach you manners when you were a soldier ?"

"You're right, but if there's anything—"

"Nonsense, get along !"

## XXIV.

### THE RAG-PICKERS' DAUGHTER.

THE kind Prosper Martin had fetched the plaisters. But in spite of their application and the diet-drink of borage which, as an universal panacea, the *ex-vivandière* had insisted on the patient swallowing, Jeanne de Rieumes, when Prosper came to see her in the morning, was no better. On the contrary, her condition seemed to be getting worse. Stretched motionless upon the rag-picker's bed, her eyes fixed and staring, Jeanne was in a state of complete prostration. And yet her lips moved, she seemed to be thinking and to wish to speak, but no sound issued from her mouth. The rag-picker cast an inquiring glance at his old friend.

"No go, my lad ; it appears to me her head's affected. That's beyond me. She must have the doctor."

"*Saperlotte !*" said "the bear," scratching his head, "my doctor's at the Notre-Dame or Lariboisière, on free days. But I can't take her on my back and carry her there."

"There are doctors about here. It's not that that's wanting ; one's as good as another, eh ?"

"Yes, but he must be paid, and I'm rather hard up. Just to carry her here I had to throw away a splendid load."

"That's bad. I've got an old crown-piece that I was keeping for my birthday. I'll pay for her. It'll bring me luck, p'raps."

"And to-morrow ?"

"Ah ! to-morrow. We shall see. In the meantime, stretch your legs and go and fetch the doctor, quick. There's no time to lose."

Martin ran off and soon returned, accompanied by a doctor. The latter started with surprise at the sight of the young girl, whose features, dress, her whole person in fact, were so strangely at variance with her surroundings.

"Who is this person ?" he asked, "and how came she here ?"

In a few words Prosper Martin and Mother Comfort informed him of what had happened. He was astounded.

"And you have not troubled to know who she might be ?" he said.

"You have not searched for her parents ?"

"We've been too busy trying to prevent her going off the hooks," replied the *ex-vivandière* drily. "It wouldn't have been much good finding her parents to give 'em a dead body."

"You are quite right. The most important thing was to look to the patient. But to-night, to-morrow—"

"Yes, of course. But look at her, sir, and tell us how she is."

The doctor examined the patient, and shook his head.

"Apparent sleep, and yet, in reality, sleeplessness," he said, "flushed forehead, inflammation of the conjunctiva, irregular shivers. Has she vomited?"

"Yes, a little."

"There is inflammation of the meninges, brain fever—the disease is making rapid way, delirium is imminent."

"What's to be done?" hazarded Mother Comfort.

"I'll write you—But, believe me, this young girl is badly situated here; you haven't means necessary to give her the attention and buy her the drugs that she will need. Go to the commissary of police, make a statement, and she will be taken to the hospital."

"To the hospital! Very well, doctor, write your prescription first. We'll see to the rest, afterwards."

The doctor scribbled a prescription.

"How much do we owe you?" then asked Martin, looking meaningly at Mother Comfort.

"Nothing, my friends; you are doing a kind act, and the least I can do is to give you my assistance. I shall see you again soon, for until she leaves you I should not like to desert my patient."

"Thanks, thanks, doctor, it's very good of you," cried the *ex-vivandière*. "You're worthy to be a soldier."

The doctor took his leave. Prosper Martin looked at his companion.

"Well, what are you staring at me like that for?"

"Do *you* want to take her to the hospital, mother, eh?"

"No, a thousand times, no."

"Nor me either. If she hasn't got every luxury she wants, she'll have at least every necessary."

"Yes, but what will you do?"

"I've an idea."

"Go along!"

"That surprises you, but it's so. I'm going to tell my mates."

"What!"

"All the *Cité Maupy*. There are some right sorts in it. I'll explain the thing to them."

"Well, I never!"

"And I shall ask them to lend a hand, so much per cent per day on the night's earnings. As it were a rag-tithe—"

"It's not such a bad idea."

"I believe you; then you approve of it?"

"Of course. And, what's better than that, my lad, I must give you a kiss. You're worthy to be in the Sixth of the Line. *Crèbleu!* Why, I'm crying like a fool."

"Kiss me, mother, as much as you like. If I wasn't in your regiment, it wasn't my fault. At present I'm serving in the rag-pickers; must keep up the honour of the regiment!"

"Run away, lad, I'll look after the child."

Prosper Martin hurried from door to door. Soon the whole cité was astir. Rag-pickers, male and female, surprised from their sleep, collected on the eminence which is situated near the entrance and asked one another about the serious matter which was about to be told them. Mother Comfort was the first to speak.

"My friends," said she, "something very touching has happened. Our comrade, Prosper Martin, *alias* 'the bear,' found last night a young lady, unconscious and dying, on the outer boulevard. There's perhaps a drama connected with this that would make M. Dumaine shudder. But, while we are waiting for it to be discovered, and for the traitor to receive his death-blow—which he well deserves—the poor girl is between life and death. The thing is to get her out of danger—"

"Go on!" cried an impatient rag-picker.

"You'd do well to keep your mug shut and listen to me. Well, comrades, this is what I propose; in order to keep this poor child from the hospital and its consequences we will take on ourselves to pay for the medicine and the whole boiling. Everyone to give something when he comes home in the morning. Some rags, others bones, a third old iron, for the patient's stock. She will be a rag-picker without knowing it."

"Good idea!" cried several of the audience.

"Business is bad," objected a dissentient voice, "we can hardly make both ends meet."

"Well, we'll pull the buckle a hole tighter. It's plain you've never been a soldier, Jabuzot. Let those who don't like it be off. There'll be plenty of willing ones left. It's the custom for the rich to give alms to the poor, now the poor can pay some of it back. Now then, who'll subscribe?"

"I! I! I!" cried a hundred voices at once.

"I, too—all of us," said Jabuzot, ashamed of his hesitation, and holding both his hands up.

"Yes, all; for you are all good fellows and true children of France," cried the *ex-vivandière* with emotion. "Well, the little one will want for nothing as long as there are rags and rag-pickers, that is to say as long as the world goes round. The rag-picker is part of Paris, for no one meddles with him."

"There's no fear of that!"

"Paris without rag-pickers, that would be a rum go."

"It's impossible, of course. So no one dreams of it."

"Splendid!" cried Prosper the bear. "Upon my word, it's like the Ambigu or the Porte-Martin. My little waif's adopted; my song brought her luck; she's the Rag-pickers' Daughter."

"Long live the Rag-pickers' Daughter!" cried the crowd.

## XXV.

### THE VISION REALISED.

WORN out by the emotions of the day, by the fatigues of the night, by the grief which the disappearance of his betrothed and his powerlessness to help her caused him, exhausted by physical suffering and the loss of blood occasioned by his wound, Clairac had fainted, and it was in a state of unconsciousness that his seconds took him back to the Place Pigalle. With a thousand precautions they placed him on his bed; then Médéric felt his pulse.

"Well?" asked the anxious reporter.

"It's odd," said the tall, fair young man, "he's feverish already. It should not have come so soon."

"Then his wound is serious?"

"No, I think not. A complication, that's all."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I, nothing. I have provided for the most urgent wants. Now let a doctor be fetched. I can't take upon myself to go on treating him. If he died, it would make it bad for me."

"Quite right. After all, we were very good-natured to undertake to be his seconds, on the spur of the moment, without knowing why or how. Our part's played now. Let us hand him over to his servant and go our ways."

"Come along. We'll call for news of him to-morrow, eh?"

"Certainly. Will you come and have breakfast with me?"

"Where?"

"At Noël's. I've got an appointment with two friends about a little affair."

"Right. But if they speak about the duel?"

"Keep silent. I won't say a word about it in my paper."

"Really?"

"Honour bright."

"The deuce. Then it's serious?"

"So it seems. I know nothing about it."

"Well, come along."

They summoned Clairac's servant and impressed upon him the most profound secrecy. Then they went off to breakfast.

When they called, two days later, to inquire after the wounded man, they were told that he was well, and had gone to the South to recruit.

"Well, he's a nice fellow!" said Voiville. "Not even a card, to say good-bye to anyone. Ah! if I hadn't promised not to tell! What a bit of news! Never mind, I have an idea."

The next day he published in his paper the following paragraph, which made the round of the press:

"Paul Clairac, the young and already celebrated artist, for whom the grand medal of the next Salon is destined, has just left for the South of France. Whilst recovering his health, which has been rather affected by continuous work, he will profit by his stay in the old Provençal towns to bring us back a series of studies."

"In this way," said Voiville, rubbing his hands, "I profit by the news, and not only do not talk too much, but prevent others from doing so."

After three days of burning fever, Paul recovered consciousness. With eyes heavy from sleep, he looked about him. Where was he? He knew not. He found himself in a room which he had never seen, and whose luxury contrasted strongly with the simplicity of his little bedroom in the Place Pigalle. Around him on all sides, from the carved and painted ceiling, hung a blue satin curtain, enclosing large mirrors, and giving repose to the eyes. At the far end, also draped with blue satin, was the bed on which he lay. Opposite him, through two large windows, entered the light, softened by stained glass windows, and broad muslin curtains.

In the half-light Paul could distinguish, upon the satin of the walls, magnificent pictures with dead-gold frames. At whose house was he? Where had he been taken to? For he recollected now. He remembered his duel—his wound—and Jeanne's abduction.

Jeanne, where was she, whilst he, unconscious, unable to defend her, was lying on this bed? He tried to rise; he felt a sharp pain; his eyes grew dim again, and he fell back on his pillow. And, through the mist which veiled his sight, a vision, the vision which he had seen on the night before the duel, re-appeared. He saw, bending over his couch, the woman with the golden face, the luxuriant tresses, the eyes of fire.

Madame Wilson, Dolores, "the princess!" She was gazing at him, covering him with a motherly look, searching his face for the least change, the least sign of pain. Why did this dream return? Why this woman's image again? Paul made an effort to dismiss this importunate vision. He tried to think of Jeanne, hoping that her beloved image would come and replace that of Dolores; vain effort. Still, still, anxious, attentive, tender, and loving, the Spanish woman's face bent over Paul's. It bent over him so closely that he touched it. He felt a burning hand pressing his own; he felt warm breath on his forehead; he felt two lips lightly touch his own.

"Ah!" he cried, angrily, "when will this dream be over?"

A dream! It was no dream. The hand which held him became icy cold, and loosed its hold; Dolores, deadly pale, drew back quickly. Paul looked at her, aghast.

"You," he muttered, "you, madame? Where am I, then?"

"At my house, where I took you in, wounded, dying."

"You! Then you knew? Yes, I remember now, the night before my duel, when I was writing to Jeanne, I thought it was fancy; then it was you?"

She bowed her head without replying. There was silence for a while. Suddenly Paul sprang up in bed.

"Where am I, then? in your house? Ah! I cannot, I must not be here, I must not remain here. Madame, I must go at once."

She rose sadly, and went and opened the door wide, then, returning to the bed, she offered the wounded man her hand to assist him to rise; he refused it. She drew back softly, looking at him without bitterness or reproach. For the second time he tried to rise. A second time he fell back strengthless.

"Oh!" he cried. "There is a curse on me!"

"No, Paul," said Dolores, in a gentle voice, and bathed with tears. "No; but you are still too weak, and it is only right to tell you that, were you strong enough to get up, you would not be sufficiently so to make the journey from here to Paris."

She trembled as she said this, as if she had done some evil deed.

"The journey!" said Paul, surprised, "the journey! Am I far from Paris, then? Where am I? Tell me, madame."

"In the country, near Nice, where I brought you by the doctor's orders, who told me that otherwise you would die."

"But, how long have I been ill?"

"Nearly a month, already," replied Dolores, turning her face away, so that it should not betray the lie she was telling.

"A month! a month! Then, what has happened during all this time in Paris? What has become of Mademoiselle de Rieumes? What crimes have been committed? Ah! madame, madame! What have I done to you, that you should make me suffer thus?"

"What have you done to me, Paul?" she replied, in accents of infinite tenderness. "What have you done to me? Do you not know that I love you with all the strength of my soul? That I love you as woman never loved? That I love you enough to drive jealousy from my heart, to conceal within myself the hatred which tortures me, to aid you, in order to see you happy, to find her who has taken my place in your affection, were she a mortal enemy, were she unworthy of you?"

"What do you say?"

"Yes, Paul, I love you as before, more than before. But my love is not selfish. Only let me see you happy, and, in the cruel torture which your happiness with another will cause me, I shall still have ineffable joy, the joys of sacrifice, the joys of martyrdom. But, mind you, what I will not allow is, that you should be deceived, that you should suffer in your love, that you should be the laughing-stock of everyone, as you were about to be."

"Wretched woman! You lie!"

"I lie? Was it I who warned you? Was it not your best friend who caught hold of you on the brink of the precipice? You tried to kill him for his pains, and it was only by wounding you that he was able to save his own life. And when wounded, dying, you were brought home, did she come, she who loves you, she for whom you fought, she for whom you were ready to die, did she even come and see what had happened?"

"She had disappeared, had been carried off."

"No, she had fled, fled with her lover, fled with the father of the child whom she was having brought up on the quiet. With the man whom the announcement of the marriage would have ruined, who was determined that it should not happen, who prevented it."

"But who? who?" cried Paul furiously, "Pringy, perhaps?"

"No, Pringy only told you what everyone knows, what you alone were ignorant of. The man for whose sake Jeanne de Rieumes has forgotten her duty and her rank is an obscure plebeian, a clerk, whom she took a fancy to, and who, loving her sincerely, forced her to follow him."

"Tell me his name!"

"Madman! what would you do? You will provoke him as you provoked the Comte de Pringy. But this man will not fight. And why should he? Because he has been the lover of a woman whom you love, whom you want to marry? Ah! Paul, my beloved Paul, how lucky is she who causes such transport in your heart! How guilty is she who despises love like yours!"

Paul raised his eyes to Dolores. She was pale and agitated. Beneath her long black eyelashes a tear had gathered, ready to roll down her cheek.

"The woman who loves sincerely," she continued, "ought to desire before anything the happiness of him whom she loves; no sacrifice, no pain should stand in her way. The woman who loves should be the devoted slave of him who has caused her heart to beat. I felt that, Paul, the day when, for the first time, I met you in my palace at Rome. In the midst of that fête of which I was queen, when all the men worshipped me, you appeared to me as my king! I who laid my commands on all, who made playthings of all, I felt that you were henceforward my master. I came to you, scorning the world and its pettiness. What mattered it to me? I loved you! Oh! Paul, what delicious days we spent alone together under the sky of Naples. If God denies me my part in Paradise, I shall have had my Paradise on earth, with you."



She spoke, and her voice, timid at first, glowed in ringing accents of strange and fascinating harmony. Her eyes, dry now, sparkled like two black diamonds, enveloping the young man in their magnetic influence. He did not attempt to interrupt her now; as if a charm had overcome him, he listened to her, at her mercy.

"You tried to escape me," she continued, "and, like a jealous lioness, I recaptured you; I would have gone to the bottom of Vesuvius—to hell—to seek you. But I found out one day that you no longer loved me, and on that day I plucked hope from my heart. The mistress became a sister, a mother rather. You asked to marry Mademoiselle de Rieumes. To bring about that marriage I would have given everything, soul, body, life. It was to make you happy. I should have suffered in silence, happy to die for your happiness. But she whom you love deceives you, deserts you. You weep, you suffer. I take you again, I resume possession of my own. I say to you, 'Paul, my Paul, come back to me. Forsaken one, shed thy tears on a sympathising breast!'"

Was it weakness occasioned by those fresh emotions, by his efforts, by pain? Was it magnetic fascination? Paul, under the influence of this woman, forgot everything. He fancied he was living over again those nights in Naples, so sweet, so intoxicating. A peculiar torpor took possession of him. And when Dolores, who, as she spoke, had brought her face closer and closer to his, touched Paul's lips with hers, Paul, seizing the fascinator's head, returned her caress by a long embrace.

If, less absorbed, Clairac had been able to get up and walk to the window, instead of the hot sun of Nice he would have seen through the muslin curtains the grey and gloomy sky of Paris, would have recognised the trees of the Champs-Élysées. He would, to his great surprise, no doubt, have heard a harsh, disagreeable voice singing beneath the window the refrain as languishing as popular :

"Our cup with frenzied pleasure full,  
Let us unhurried wend our way;  
And for my darling let me cull  
The lilac's very earliest spray."

## XXVI.

### THE TWO BLIND MEN.

THE man who was singing the romance wore a pitiful appearance; clad in shapeless and nameless rags, his face covered with red blotches, his eyes staring, fixed, and white, his gait painful and uncertain. He was one of those hundred thousand beggars of Paris who, in spite of prohibitive orders, live on charity, and very frequently on public credulity. This one, however, appeared to be deserving of pity, for the nameless disease of which he bore the traces on his face had deprived him of his sight, as this placard on his breast testified :

### BLIND.

#### FROM TURNING OF THE BLOOD.

What is the meaning of "turning of the blood?" It matters little; the

wretched man suffered, at any rate, and frequent soups were dropped into his greasy and misshapen straw hat.

"And for my darling let me cull  
The lilac's very earliest spray."

Standing in front of the house, the blind man, in a burst of enthusiasm, raised his eyes to heaven. And although almost all the shutters were closed, saving on the second floor--in the room in which Paul Clairac laid, and of which the curtains alone were drawn--those eyes, dead, lifeless, expressionless, seemed eager to plunge into the interior of the house. Once the curtains moved, the blind man started, but that was all, and, moving on, he continued his song :

"Our cup with frenzied pleasure full  
Let us unhurried wend our way."

"So much the worse !" said the beggar, pausing, "Not a cat about. No one moving in the place, and my throat begins to feel bad. Let's have a rest for a minute. We'll go on with the song presently."

His eyes resumed their normal expression, which caused a great change in his face. In spite of the red blotches which covered his face, it was easy now to recognise the detective, Fauvette, the chief of police's right hand man. What was Fauvette doing, and why this disguise? The reason was that, since the confrontation, and in spite of the arguments of M. Dauffin, the magistrate, and of M. Manuel, the commissary, the chief of police was convinced of M. de Pringy's innocence, at least in so far as concerned the murder. As he said, a man does not commit two crimes thus distinct without there being a point of contact between them. And, moreover, the count's attitude struck him. He was ready to stake his life that this man had been the victim of a fatal error. It was important, then, either to discover the connection between the crimes, or to prove the accused's innocence. His examination had disclosed but little. Too proud to have recourse to subterfuges, Pringy had told the magistrate almost everything.

He had told him how, having learnt that Jeanne had a child at nurse, he had gone to Charly ; how he had warned Paul Clairac ; how the latter, after having hesitated a moment, had challenged him to a duel ; how the next morning he had learnt upon the ground, from his opponent's mouth, Jeanne's flight. He had only concealed one fact : the way in which he had heard of little Jean-Marie-Victor's existence. He was ashamed to confess that he had had recourse to an agency, and to mix up M. Loyal-Franceur's name in the matter. The introduction of the latter would, he felt, have been more hurtful than profitable. It would have given his conduct a mercantile and shady appearance which would have been fatal. Far from enlightening the magistrate, this tale had only had the effect of convincing him more and more strongly of the count's cunning and duplicity. So he pushed matters on and made up his mind to commit him to the next assizes.

Fortunately for Pringy, M. Dauffin is the born foe of the press and of papers of every shade of opinion, which he detests and despises as the organs of scandal and corruption. But, besides this, he was anxious not to compromise the name of Mademoiselle de Rieumes, who was still being sought for in vain. It was this fact which had prevented him from sending a commissioner to Château-Thierry to examine the woman Derousse. Accordingly he had carefully kept secret all the details of the case. Gratien Voiville him-

self, in spite of the part he had taken in the discovery of the crime, had been obliged to keep his mouth shut. But during this time the chief of police had set on foot a counter-investigation. For this purpose he had summoned Antheaume and Fauvette, of whom M. Manuel had no need, and who were already informed of the course that events had taken.

"To make an inquiry properly," he said to them, "it is necessary not only to look to probabilities but, in addition, to get to know the antecedents and history of the people who, in some way or other, have been mixed up in the affair. So go and find out. I want biographies of the victim, the prisoner, the girl, her lover, and all those with whom they associate."

"How much time do you give us for that, sir?" Fauvette had asked.

"*Carte blanche*, provided that you have finished before the prisoner is arraigned."

"A good month at least, then."

"About that."

"You shall have it."

The two comrades had departed and settled upon their parts. Antheaume was to devote his attention to Jeanne and the count: Fauvette to Pedrillo and Paul Clairac. Now, Fauvette had learned some strange things. In the first place about the pretended lieutenant-general of his Catholic Majesty, Don Pedrillo de la Concha de San-Fernando y Galiano—known in all the hells as a sharper, and possibly something worse; having for a long time past lived at the expense of a gay woman named Dolores; still preserving relations—occasionally somewhat strained—with a Spanish woman known under the name of "the princess," Madame Wilson, the Marquise de la Galiano, who lived in a splendid mansion in the Avenue Montaigne. Then, to his great surprise, that Paul Clairac had been the princess's lover at Rome, and that she had followed him to Paris.

Between these three individuals there was a secret. Paul and Pedrillo appeared to have been rivals formerly. A strange business. If, instead of the Comte de Pringy, it was Paul Clairac who had murdered the Spaniard? What a discovery! Fauvette, whose brain was hard at work, had gone to the Place Pigalle and asked to see Paul. He expected to be told that he was wounded, ill. He had to confess himself nonplussed when the servant coolly said to him:

"M. Clairac is not in Paris. He is travelling in the South."

"Whereabouts?"

"No one knows."

"Where would a letter reach him?"

"Here."

"How would letters be sent to him?"

"He will send to fetch them; or he will find them here on his return."

Fauvette retired, crestfallen. But a thought struck him all at once—the "princess?" By watching her he might arrive at a solution of the mystery. We have seen that he was right. It was Dolores who, on the evening of the day on which the duel was fought, on carrying off the still unconscious Paul to her house, had given the young man's servant—heavily tipped by her—orders to say that M. Clairac was away. Returning to head quarters, Fauvette got himself up as a blind man and made his way to the Avenue Montaigne. He had been there for two hours, not even succeeding in causing a window to be opened, when he uttered an exclamation of surprise. From the end of the avenue another blind man was approaching, tapping with his stick; this one, "blind from amaurosis,"

was wearing a pair of enormous blue spectacles which concealed his eyes and eyebrows.

"Hallo!" said Fauvette, "a rival! We shall be like Patachon and Giraffier on the Pont des Arts. It's funny, I have an idea that this fellow is no more blind than I am."

Without further ado he walked with arms stretched out towards the fresh arrival. The latter held on his way. A collision was inevitable. It took place.

"Take care, fool!" cried Fauvette.

"Take care yourself, I'm blind!" replied the new comer, in a doleful voice.

But in the shock his spectacles had become disarranged. Fauvette had seen his adversary's eyes.

"I beg pardon, sir, I'm blind myself," he murmured, piteously. "But I'm going. I'll make way for you. I've not made a sou here," and off he went.

"Who can this fellow be?" said the blind man to himself, when he had gone.

As for Fauvette, he remarked: "Loyal-Francœur, the inquiry-agent of the Rue des Chantres! The plot thickens."

## XXVII.

### IN WHICH THE CHIEF OF POLICE BEGINS TO SEE THE CONNECTION.

M. LOYAL-FRANCOEUR, for his part, had not recognised Fauvette. And yet this odd meeting with a second blind man outside the "princess's" house should not have failed to astonish him. But he had other matters to think of. When, on the evening of the day of the duel, he had presented himself at the house and had been told that Madame Wilson was away, when he had sworn not to let himself be "floored," as he said, his first thought had been to go to the Place Pigalle. He, too, had been told that Paul Clairac had gone away. That had made him feel rather uneasy. Had Dolores really carried the artist off, and had she really gone herself? But, that evening, on returning to the Avenue Montaigne, after several hours of fruitless observation, he had finally seen lights within. The house was inhabited, then. Now, allowing that they were only used by servants, it was still a sign that the absence of the mistress of the house would not be of long duration, unless, indeed, this woman, peculiar as she was, had had the idea of going away alone, giving up everything in order to live alone with Paul in some unknown retreat. In this case it would be advisable to watch the house; perhaps he would be able to discover the secret of this retreat. There were several ways of doing this: to follow a servant to the post, look out for the postman, and try to discover the address of a letter. It was with this intent that, disguised, and, as he believed, unrecognisable, he was keeping an eye on the house and searching for some clue.

But the windows remained closed, and on two occasions the porter had come out and requested the unfortunate beggar to take his infirmity and his doleful songs elsewhere. He persisted nevertheless, saying to himself, with his cunning instinct, that if the game was not in its haunt it would sooner or later return there. He had just acquired a proof that there was

someone in the house, when he was recognised by the detective. The latter lost no time, and, without pulling off his disguise, he made his way to the Quai de l'Horloge. The police sentinel at the door looked at him in astonishment. As a rule persons in the category to which Fauvette seemed to belong only entered this door in the prison van. But, after all, as the *commissariat* for the Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois district is there, the blind man had perhaps come to have his papers examined, to ask for assistance, or to give himself up as a prisoner; the sentinel let him pass. He crossed the court-yard of the Dépôt, entered the "temporary" corridor, which for the last four or five years has served as the entry to this part of the building, and mounted to the first-floor, where are situated the offices affected by the frail fair and the private room of the chief of police. Fauvette entered coolly and, forgetting his disguise, held out his hand to the doorkeeper, who started with surprise and indignation.

"Is the chief in?" he asked.

"Fauvette!" cried the man. "Devil take me if I should know you, if it had not been for your voice. *Sapristi!* what a get up!—what a face!"

"All right, all right, I'm in a hurry."

"The chief's in but he's working, and has given orders not to be disturbed. But, if it's urgent—"

"Very urgent."

"I'll tell him, then; but wait a minute, go into that room. Your appearance is rather too bad."

"Go along, go along, there are worse than me."

The porter went and knocked at the chief's door. The latter was, in fact, at work. Continuing his investigations into the "Pringy affair," as the magistrate called it, and which he had named the "X. affair," he had thought it advisable to interrogate the nurse at Charly, and had entrusted this task to Antheaume. In the pretended inspector of nursed children the detective had had no difficulty in recognising the Comte de Pringy, and this had confirmed the answers given by the accused in his examination. But, at the same time, Antheaume had succeeded in discovering the name of the midwife who had confided the child to the nurse's care.

"I don't know what her name is," said Victoire, "but I heard the name of the street; it's the name of something to eat."

"What? Rue de la Fromagererie, de la Boucherie?"

"No, wait a minute, it's bread."

"The Rue Daufin, the Rue—"

"No, the Rue Tranche—Coupe—"

"The Rue Taille-Pain?"

"That's it: Taille-Pain. Yes, that's right. I thought it was something about bread. Yes, it's a midwife of the Rue Taille-Pain."

With his wonted skill Antheaume had soon found out Madame Broussel's name. He knew, therefore, that it was she who had taken little Jean-Victor to Madame Derousse's. Getting to know next the approximate age of the child, he had searched at the registrar's office of the Fourth District and had soon found the certificate of birth, which we have seen in Monsieur Loyal-Franccœur's hands, and of which he took a copy to his chief. The latter had, therefore, almost all the necessary evidence in the new inquiry which he had set on foot. We know that the chief of police acted, for the most part, on reasoning and deduction. With him a criminal case was a problem, the solution of which must be discovered, an algebraic equation of which he had to find the unknown quantity. Given the side

of the equation, the question was to find X. Having examined one after the other all the connections which it was possible existed between Don Pedrillo the victim, and Pringy the presumed murderer ; between Clairac and Pringy ; between Clairac and the "princess," he was trying to discover the grand tie which bound them all together. This tie he could not find. He read over for the fourth time little Jean-Victor's certificate of birth.

"What is this child ?" he muttered, for the trap was too clumsy for him to suppose for a moment that he was really the son of Mademoiselle de Rieumes. "What is this child, and what interest had anyone, or rather, who had an interest in making it pass for that of this girl ? Someone who wanted to prevent her marriage. Here two cases present themselves ; either a man who loves her, or a woman who loves her intended. The woman I know, but she herself, as I am told, has broken off with Clairac, her lover ; and, if it be she, why did she have Pedrillo murdered, who played towards her the part of Sigisbé, and who interfered in none of her whims—on the contrary ? Well, if it be she, how did she go to work ? who helped her ? if she was the head, who was the arm ? What do they want to do with the poor baby ? Where did they get it ? Son of Victor Borin. Who is Victor Borin ? The midwife—I know her ; I have seen her twice at Saint-Lazare ; the witnesses : a commissionaire and a practitioner—a practitioner ! some poor copyist dying of hunger, to whom they give a few francs and a glass of wine to go to the mayor's." The chief had arrived at this point when the doorkeeper entered.

"What is it ? I don't want to be disturbed," cried the magistrate

"It's Fauvette, who says he has something to tell you."

"Show him in, quick !"

Fauvette, still as Patachon, but as proud in his rags as Don Cæsar de Bazan, threw himself like a bomb-shell into his chief's room.

"A discovery, sir ! Whom do you think I found as a rival blind man, in front of the princess's house ? Loyal-Francœur, the inquiry-agent of the Rue des Chantres !"

"An inquiry-agent !" cried the chief of police. "Ah ! I've found my link !"

## XXVIII.

### ZIDORE'S CONFIDENCES.

"I UNDERSTAND," repeated the chief of police ; "but will the magistrate understand ? He persists in piling up what he believes to be proofs against this poor count, who, I am certain, has been but an unconscious instrument. But why did not the count say that it was Loyal-Francœur who was behind him ?"

"He was afraid of compromising himself, perhaps," hazarded Fauvette.

"You are right ; pride ! human imbecility ! people get their heads cut off from pride. What a strange phantasmagoria is humanity ! I who, by virtue of the law, am charged with the discovery of crime, am forced now to make every effort to prove that this supposed murderer is innocent."

"Who forces you ?" said Fauvette. "Let them go ahead."

"Yes, others would do so in my place. What matters the life of a

man? A mere trifle! Of what account is a head which falls beneath the knife of the guillotine? A fig! As long as the honour of the law remains intact; as long as it is granted that the police are not wrong. Well, I won't admit that. No! No! No!"

He brought his fist down on the table. Fauvette looked at him aghast. "Yes, that was the theory of Vidocq, and of Coco-Latour, his successor," continued the chief of police, without noticing the effect he had produced on his listener. "Yes, a victim they must have. This victim they got hold of anyhow, the first chance, some poor wretch tired of life, unable to defend himself. People praised their skill, their names became famous—infamous! That course I will not pursue; that notoriety I will not earn!"

"The fact is—" began Fauvette.

"People will say that I am not so clever as I should be," continued the chief. "Yes, not so clever, but at least an honest man and not an assassin. Yes, when I am certain of a culprit's guilt I pursue him to the end with fury, with eagerness, with rage. But when I see a poor wretch, overwhelmed with proofs, crushed by lying charges, ready to become a fresh victim of judicial mistakes, I am as eager to save him as I am to destroy a criminal. And it is for that reason that, as my colleagues say, I 'make a mess of things;' they say I'm a blunderer. My own conscience says to me: 'You are an honest man.'"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the detective enthusiastically.

"Hullo, Fauvette, I was not thinking of you—I had forgotten you—I had gone back to my dreams," said the chief of police, coming to his senses. "I've so many troubles, look you. Nowadays people mistrust me, suspect me, hate me, they accuse me of inactivity."

"Oh, sir," protested Fauvette.

"Yes, they accuse me of inactivity, I who work twelve and fifteen hours a day. Let them leave me alone, they shall see—but no, all their wits are employed in putting stumbling-blocks in my path, in preventing me from succeeding. Instead of being a great and holy league, to which everyone contributes for the public good, the police is nowadays no better than a badly managed machine in which everyone tries to overreach his neighbour."

"That's true," said Fauvette. "But, sir, supposing we returned to our affair."

"You are right. I'm dreaming, and saying what I ought to keep to myself. Like a bad soldier, I'm complaining of want of discipline and am preaching it myself. Everything is going to the bad, for certain, and the most devoted are going with the stream. Fauvette, my lad, you must forget what you have heard."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm wrong, I'm wrong. When the general commands, no one, neither officer nor soldier, should dispute. Fauvette, you are an old Zouave, you must understand that?"

"I quite understand it, sir, but, all the same—"

"Enough. To our business. We are dogs, we must find the game and bring back the pack from the false scent. It is our duty, let us fulfil it. Where did you say M. Loyal-Francoeur lived?"

"No. 13, Rue des Chantres."

"He must be watched, but cautiously. This man, mind you, is the moving spirit in the whole affair. But, I'd stake my life on it that he has taken his measures so that there shall be no proof against him. If we make a false step, if he suspects that he is being watched, he will slip out

of our hands, and all our labour will be in vain. He's not a wolf to be dislodged, he's a fox to be tracked ; act accordingly, Fauvette."

"Command, sir, I will obey."

"There's another matter. The girl. This wretch must have hidden her away in some corner only known to himself. She is his hostage, his guarantee. If we arrested him, we should never set eyes on her again."

"What's to be done, then ?"

"He must be narrowly and safely watched. It is a question of life and death. Ah ! one important question. Does Loyal-Francœur know you ?"

"No, I don't think so. I saw him at the court one day, with one of his clients. I took notice of his face. But he had no reason for noticing me."

"Then go and do your best. I shall try and obtain a further postponement from the magistrate. May God help us to do the rest !"

The next morning, at ten o'clock exactly, a gentleman presented himself at the Rue des Chantres. A fair specimen of a suburban tradesman, small straw hat, an overcoat provided with an enormous and pretentious rabbit-skin collar, heavy waxed shoes, shining like a looking-glass, small gold earrings, a prodigious silver watch-chain, and green wool mittens covering his wrists. He rang timidly and waited. Isidore, as usual, went and half opened the door.

"M. Loyal-Francœur lives here, doesn't he ?" asked the good man in a hesitating voice.

"What do you want ?" replied the humpback's squeaky voice.

"Ah, it's a long story, sir. A most complicated affair. You must know that on All Saints' day—no, it was the 'Day of the Dead,' my cousin Lardiche came to see me. Wait a minute, I think I'm wrong ; it *was* All Saints'."

"Come in," said the humpback, drawing back.

The man came in.

"Sit down," said the humpback.

The man sat down, placed his hat on the ground by the side of his chair and dragged an enormous pocket-book from his overcoat.

"As I was telling you, M. Loyal-Francœur, my cousin came to my house to dinner. Well—"

"I'm not M. Loyal-Francœur," said the humpback drily. "Wait."

"Ah ! I beg pardon ; I thought—And where is he, the good gentleman ?"

"He's out."

"Ah ! will it be long before he's in ?"

"I don't know."

"That's awkward. But you, sir, you're in his shop."

"There's no shop here. There's a business and consulting office," said the clerk drily.

"I beg pardon ; but, look you, it's habit. No offence. You see, I've got a shop—Jean-Baptiste Palaiseau, at your service, if I can do anything for you. I live at Montrouge, Rue d'Alésia, a new street. I bought some land there—cheap. I built a shop and set up as a seedsman. It's not a bad trade, but it depends on the season. There are ups and downs."

"What's all that to me ?" said the humpback crossly.

"Ah ! that's true, you're not your own master, but I've got my business. I came by the Montrouge tramway to the Eastern Railway station. They're very convenient, those trancars. A while back we had only a



little omnibus where there was never any room, and once I had a rather funny adventure. There was a young lady in the neighbourhood had an appointment. She goes into the office—”

“I must beg you, sir; I’ve got my work to do.”

“Ah, that’s true. I’ll shut up.”

The seedsman threw himself back in his armchair and pulled out his watch.

“*Saperlotte!*” he muttered, “twenty-five minutes to eleven, and my wife alone in the shop. I say, young man, you who belong to the ship—”

“What ship?” asked the humpback, losing all patience.

“To the trade, to the crib, there! you couldn’t give me a consultation, in your master’s place?”

“I don’t give consultations.”

“But it is so simple, you see; I’ll pay you well. I’ve confidence in you.”

Jean Baptiste Palaiseau placed a ten-franc piece on the humpback’s desk. The latter hesitated. We know that money had an irresistible influence on him.

“Well, we might see what we could do,” he hazarded.

“Listen, young man, I’m rather confused in this place. I’m used to doing my business over a glass. If a trot out for a few minutes isn’t inconvenient—”

“The master might come in.”

“That’s your affair. Then I’ll wait. But if you thought he would be long—”

The humpback hesitated. On one hand the love of gain tempted him; but, on the other, M. Loyal-Francœur had expressly ordered him not to leave the office. Quite taken up, first with Jeanne de Rieumes, and afterwards with the “princess,” Loyal-Francœur did not know of M. de Pringy’s arrest. He was unaware even that the police had discovered the murder of Don Pedrillo. He had taken such infinite precautions to favour the idea of suicide and to conceal the identity of the body! He was awaiting, then, his “client’s” visit; the client who had been so useful to him, the client who had done so much in such a short time. But, in consequence of Jeanne’s unexpected escape, his position towards Pringy had been a trifle modified. He had told him with so much confidence that he would discover the young girl, that he trembled to see him arrive, the bearer of a cheque for two hundred thousand francs, and demanding that the bargain should be carried out. What a blow to have to refuse the cheque and confess his impotence! Accordingly the inquiry-agent had temporarily deserted his office in the Rue de Chantres, where Isidore remained alone, with orders to make the clients wait, to entertain them, to get them to call again. This task was a most unpleasant one to the humpback, accustomed as he was to work like a machine, and accordingly he performed it very badly.

“Well, what do you say? Just one glass, while I explain my business?” said the seedsman, seeing that the clerk hesitated.

“If I was certain the master wouldn’t come in—” began the latter.

“Well, do you think I should wait—?”

“He’s out of town. Only I don’t want to leave the place empty. Would you keep me long?”

“Just the time to wet my throat, so that the words will come out easier.”

“And we shall come back here?”

“Of course.”

“Come along, then, quick.”

The seedsman took up his hat, the clerk put on his cap and shut the door. They went downstairs.

"Do you know of a snug nook?" asked Jean-Baptiste Palaiseau.

"Yes, down here, in the Rue Chanoinesse; a place where I sha'n't be seen, and from which I can see whether master arrives."

"Oh, then he'll come this way?"

"Of course; he always goes in by the private entrance."

"Private entrance? where?" cried the seedsman quickly.

"Why, haven't you read the circular?" said the humpback, with a certain mistrust.

"Yes, but I didn't notice it—You were saying that this entrance—?"

"Is the master's, and has nothing to do with anyone else. But let's hurry, if we're going to have anything to drink," said the humpback, drily. "I've got my business, too, and I don't want to lose my time."

"What will you drink! Wine, rum, cognac?"

"A small glass of dry champagne."

"Waiter, two 'drys.'"

"Two 'drys!'" Goodness knows what mixture the wine merchant dignified with this name. But it was alcohol, at any rate. That is the principal thing for the consumer. The humpback trembled as he saw the golden liquor poured out.

"Your health," said Jean-Baptiste Palaiseu.

"Yours."

"Shall we have another?"

"Well, you see, I'm not used to it," he said: "I'm afraid it might upset me."

"Nonsense. Two for luck. Besides, we have to talk business before we drink."

"Yes, we have to talk business," repeated the humpback, whose eyes glistened.

"Let's sit down then," continued Palaiseau, "as you'll see when your master comes. Waiter, two more 'drys.'"

"Yes, I shall see my master—that's true. Waiter, two more 'drys.'"

"That'll be four; have a care!" said the seedsman with his good-natured laugh.

"How four?"

"Yes, two I ordered and two you ordered. Well, never mind, we can drink 'em."

"Yes, we'll drink them," said the humpback, upon whom the first glass had already had an effect.

The waiter brought the four glasses. The humpback gulped his down eagerly. His little eyes shone like two lanterns.

"It's healthy this cold weather," said Palaiseau. "Now, mister clerk, shall I tell you my business?"

"Yes, go on, I'm listening.—You were saying—"

"I was saying that I was threatened with a lawsuit in consequence of a delivery I made."

"But you were speaking of your cousin," muttered the humpback, whose face was growing purple.

"Exactly so, it was him that got me the custom of the man who's going to law with me, a nobleman, a count."

"Ah! a count, certainly—"

"This count, who passes for being very rich—I say, won't you have another glass?"

"No, thanks."

"Do, just a small cognac. Waiter, two cognacs, and—leave us the bottle." The two drank again. The seedsman continued:

"Well, I was saying that my customer, M. le comte de Pringy—." He looked keenly at the humpback. The latter started.

"The Comte de Pringy," he muttered in a thick voice, "a good fellow, he is—he doesn't come now, more's the pity."

"Do you know him, then?" asked the seedsman eagerly.

"Me, no—that is to say—the master's—playing him—a trick—he has told him—But what do *you* want to know for, eh?"

"Why, I have to do with the count."

"The count—yes, he pays well, he does—he's a good fellow—I'll tell him everything."

"What? what have you got to tell him, then?"

"That he's been tricked; that my master—Look here, between us two, the master's a scoundrel," said the humpback, who was now quite drunk.

"Yes, I know that."

"You know it. I know it, too. But you, you've no proofs—I have. proofs, look you; your health, my dear what's your name—Machin, whatever is your name?"

"Palaiseau. But you were saying that these proofs—"

"Everything!—I have everything!" said the humpback, with an emphatic gesture. "Everything!—I've looked, do you see—through the hole—a hole I made—in the wall.—He doesn't know. I've seen the cupboard."

"What cupboard? Go on, speak out!"

The humpback began to laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! you'd like to know, Beloiseau—ha, ha, ha! I'm sharper than you—I sha'n't tell you."

"Have another glass with me."

"No, I've drunk enough. When I drink, I talk too much, and you'll rob me of my fortune. For I shall make a fortune out of it, do you hear, my friend—Bagneux—for you are my friend, eh? what's your name?"

"*Sapristi!* I've given him too much," said Fauvette angrily to himself, for it was he who, disguised as a seedsman, had gone to the inquiry-agent's to have a look round and question the clerk. "Well, mister clerk, what cupboard were you talking about, eh?"

"Don't shake me like that," said the humpback, still laughing, "it confuses my ideas. And don't keep going round, Anthony, it makes me go round too. I've got a headache, Montrouge—I'm falling—hold me up, Châtillon." Slipping from his chair, the humpback sank into a heap under the table.

"There," said Fauvette, "another chance gone. I shall get nothing more out of him."

## XXIX.

### IN WHICH THE CHIEF OF POLICE SEES CLEARLY.

WITHOUT the loss of a moment Fauvette went back to tell his chief what he had learnt.

"So," said the latter reflectively, "this Loyal-Francœur has a cupboard in which we should, no doubt, discover something useful. Goodness! what family secrets must be there, how many mysteries of which we might dis-

cover the solution, how many crimes, unexplained hitherto, about which we should at last know the truth ! ”

He rested his head in his hands and began to reflect. Fauvette looked at him in silence.

“ Oh ! ” he continued, “ if one only had one’s choice ; if one could, knowing it was impossible to do wrong, lay hands on all this lot and make a thorough search in their dens ! But no, they are tradesmen ; they are licensed ; the law protects them, as it protects thieving bankers and poisoners who are set up in shops. It’s commerce ; they are sacred.”

“ Then, sir,” said Fauvette, timidly, “ there’s nothing for us to do ? ”

“ What can I do ? And yet, something must be done ; could we not bribe the hump-back who told you this ? ”

“ I don’t think so. Being drunk, he talked. He will be on his guard now.”

“ And Loyal-Franceur’s assistants ? ”

“ Oh, we could get at them more easily, for the poor wretches hardly earn enough to live on. I used to know one of the same kidney. A poor trade ! The best of them doesn’t earn more than five francs a day. And, for that, they must be on foot from morning to night. There are some that only get four and a half, and even four francs, and those are the ones that have to do the most. And, besides that, they are forbidden to take a ’bus, except at their own expense, and the sack if they don’t succeed in what they are ordered to do. When I tell you—you’ll think it odd, sir—that the one I knew, who was ordered to get information about a girl that a married man had seduced, found that his best plan was to become the lover of the girl’s mother, in order to get the best information—”

“ Ha, ha ; well, *he* succeeded, at any rate ? ”

“ The mother was an old hag of forty-eight, a tippler, and stinking of tobacco a mile off. It was a heavy sacrifice. Well, after having triumphed over her virtue, which was not a very difficult task, and not a very agreeable one, my friend learnt with grief that she had not seen her daughter for two years.”

“ Poor fellow ! ” said the chief of police.

“ Yes, you may say so ; for his master kicked him out, without taking into consideration the herculean task he had laid upon himself. Look here, sir, I’m devoted to you, and to the service as well, but, upon my word, if you asked that of me, I should refuse ! ”

“ All right, Fauvette, I shan’t go as far as that,” said the chief of police, laughing. “ But, about these men, we ought easily to win them over to our interests.”

“ Of course ; but unfortunately they know nothing. Their master meets them in some crib where you must know the password. No fear of him admitting them into his sanctuary. And, besides, for the most part of their time, they are working without knowing the aim of the affair, each one contributing his portion, and the chief stringing it all together—like here, of course, except that they are treated worse. They are our rivals, these agents, sir. There are some of them who have cards printed almost like ours, and who give themselves out as detectives to the people they want to work on, and the next day the papers are down on us for it.”

“ And we are obliged to keep our mouths shut ; yes, my poor Fauvette, I know all about it. When I ask for an inquiry I am told by my superiors that the storm had best be allowed to blow over.”

“ It’s hard.”

"Yes, it's hard. But a man must bear anything for duty's sake, and, after all, his honour and conscience are safe, and that's something. But we've talked enough, Fauvette ; we must act."

"How ?"

"How ? I know not. But I shall find out. Before we go any further, I must see the magistrate."

The next day, at four o'clock, he went to the Palais. M. Dauffin was just in the act of submitting his prisoner to a fresh examination. During the five days that Pringy had been in prison, he had changed wonderfully. However confident he had remained of the infallibility of the law, he had had to undergo some severe trials. When, transferred from the Dépôt to Mazas, he had been forced to put on the prison dress, his whole being had revolted ; he had almost made up his mind to struggle, to resist. When, on the following day, he had had to get into "Black Maria ;" when, from this degrading vehicle, he had had to enter that sewer known as the "mouse-trap," where the prisoners await their turn to be examined, each stage of this series of tortures had hollowed out a wrinkle on his face. It was in a state of depression and despair that he appeared before the magistrate. M. Dauffin, for his part, looked complacently on this atonement. He saw in it the all-powerful action of the law on a conscience overcome with remorse ; and he looked forward to an early and full confession. On the contrary, weary of torture, poor Pringy had determined to say no more.

"So," said M. Dauffin, solemnly, for the hundredth time ; "so, prisoner, you persist in your denial ?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a deplorable plan, which I should advise you to abandon. A frank and open confession would be favourably looked upon. Well, what say you ?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing, what depravity ! I could understand it in a peasant without the benefits of education. But a man of the world, a nobleman, an old officer. Come, will you not reconsider it ?"

Pringy was silent.

"Eh ? What have you to say ? Come."

"Nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Not even what has become of Mademoiselle de Rieumes ?"

"I do not know."

"And yet, this letter, written by you to the father ; for you did write it ?"

"Certainly."

"Well, in it you promised, in consideration of a large sum of money, to restore Mademoiselle de Rieumes to her father."

"I had certain means to bring it about."

"Will you not state those means ?"

"No."

"But you are ruining yourself, wretched man !" cried the magistrate, forsaking the majestic dignity which was usual with him. "You are heaping on your head all the terrors of the law."

"I care not."

M. Dauffin looked at his clerk, who shrugged his shoulders. At that moment there was a knock at the door.

"The chief of police wants to speak to you immediately, sir."

"Show him in."

The chief of police entered, bowed to the magistrate, and looked with interest at poor Pringy, who had risen on his arrival.

"I have something of importance to tell you," he said, in a whisper.

"About what case?"

"This one."

"Step this way."

Each examining magistrate's room possesses, adjoining and communicating with the principal apartment, a little room with a separate egress. It serves to receive anyone who has no connection with the case which is in progress, an important witness who does not wish to be seen by the others, articles to be brought forward as evidence, etc. It was into this room that M. Dauffin showed the chief of police. The latter informed him of all that Fauvette had learnt, and explained to him his deductions and ideas. The magistrate was not convinced.

"So," said he, "you think that the Comte de Pringy—"

"Is only an involuntary instrument in the hands of an inquiry-agent who is acting, in his turn, on behalf of some powerful individual."

"And we can't arrest these people?"

"No. We have no proof. But, if we release Pringy, if, placed at temporary liberty, we have him watched by good detectives, perhaps we should arrive at something."

"But it would be difficult to release him now."

"Why, are you not free to—"

"Certainly, but—"

A loud uproar interrupted the magistrate. This uproar proceeded from the public corridor. The chief of police opened the door and saw a man with his clothes in disorder struggling in the midst of the policemen and door-keepers, who were trying to drag him away.

"I tell you I must speak to the chief of police," cried the man. "It's a serious question, an important revelation. Tell him I'm Paul Clairac."

"Paul Clairac!" cried the chief of police; "stop, men; show that gentleman in here. Quick!"

### XXX.

#### AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

How had Paul Clairac, whom we left with Dolores, completely fallen under the charm of his former mistress, come there? The fact merits an explanation. We saw the young artist, fascinated, overcome, struggling vainly against this woman's influence, and allowing himself to be subjugated by this strange influence or fascination. It was no longer the fierce, unbridled, passionate love that he had felt at Rome and Naples; it was an inexplicable charm from which he had not had the power to tear himself. When he awoke the next morning he reproached himself for his weakness. He was horrified at his baseness; he loved Jeanne, he loved her with the whole strength of his soul; he knew her to be in peril, and he remained there, inactive; he had gone to sleep in the arms of this Circe. Oh! coward! coward! traitor! He had tried to get up, to leave the house; but an incomprehensible weakness, an irresistible langour had prevented him.

And then she had returned, coaxing, caressing, suppliant ; he had not dared to break this heart which poured itself out to him. She had asked his forgiveness, had talked to him of Jeanne, of Jeanne whom she wished to help him to find, of Jeanne in whose favour she would retire when it was necessary, entreating him in return to grant her the few hours of happiness and love which she had yet to enjoy on earth.

And he had yielded. Then, with that entrancing smile which so well became her coral lips, Dolores had given him a cordial, and all at once a strength unknown before had come upon him ; he seemed to be imbued with new life, and at the same time his troubled mind had forgotten the past, the terrible drama, the loss of Jeanne, the anguish, everything, to think no more but of the present, of joy, of love, of transport. To this intoxication had succeeded a fearful torpor, a heavy sleep, besotted like that proceeding from opium.

He slept. Leaning on her elbow, Dolores gazed at him, enwrapping him in a look full of jealous tenderness.

"Jeanne, Jeanne," he murmured.

"Oh ! for ever that name, that woman ! My God, why cannot I crush her, so that he should forget her for ever ?"

The door opened. Mamma, the faithful negress, crept up to Dolores.

"What is it, Mamma ?" said the princess severely. "I gave orders that no one should come in here without my permission."

"Mistress, there's a gentleman downstairs. He says he knows you are here, and that you must see him."

"Was he not told that I was away ?"

"Yes, but he gave me a letter, telling me to let you have it."

"And the letter ?"

"Here it is."

The negress held out an envelope. Dolores quickly tore it open and uttered a terrible cry. The envelope contained a card only, but this card was as follows : Pedrillo Moreno de San-Fernando y Galiano. Lieutenant-General in the Spanish Service. With these three words in pencil : "An affair of the utmost importance."

"What is the matter ?" asked Paul, raising himself up in bed.

"Nothing, nothing, dear. Only business. I shall be back in two minutes."

Dragging the negress into the next room, she asked in a whisper :

"Who brought this ?"

"Mistress, I told you ; a gentleman who is downstairs with the porter, and who won't go away."

"Go and fetch him quickly, and without noise. Tell him to come up. No, show him into the conservatory ; I'll come down ; tell him I'll come down directly."

The negress left the room. Dolores went into Paul's room. He was sleeping peacefully. She imprinted a kiss on his forehead. He did not move. She left the room and went down a private staircase which led directly to the grand conservatory. This conservatory she had had arranged and decorated especially for Paul ; she had made a veritable winter garden of it, where, in the midst of the rarest plants, the balmy and languishing scents of the tropics, beneath an always uniform temperature, she looked forward to passing long and rapturous hours with her lover. She hurried

thither, anxious and trembling. What had happened? Had Loyal-Francœur deceived her? Pedrillo was not dead, or was it his ghost that had left the grave? Before opening the door, which was one large sheet of plate glass, she looked. A tall man was standing with his back to her, looking at the flowers. He wore a frock-coat and was holding his hat in his hand. In this way she was able to see his black, curly hair. Was it really Pedrillo? Dolores shuddered. She thought of flight. But hers was a brave and manly nature. She threw the door open sharply, and entered. The man turned round. Rage seized the young woman. Her visitor was none other than M. Loyal-Francœur!

"You! you!" she cried. "What comedy are you playing, and by what right do you come here?"

"Why, my little lady," replied the inquiry-agent in a bantering voice, "you know the famous adage: 'If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain;' the idea is none the worse for having been started by a Mussulman. You have forgotten me, I have come to remind you of myself."

She crushed him with a look of sovereign disdain. "Did I not pay you for what you did?" she said in a voice of suppressed rage; "now I know you no longer, I don't want to know you; and I insist above all that the name under which you announced yourself here shall not be pronounced between us."

"Oh," said Loyal-Francœur, who was not disconcerted, "the name upsets you, then? Upon my word, one might think that it occasions regret. Ha, ha, ha, it's no one's now, is it? Why should I hesitate to adopt it?"

"Enough, this interview has lasted long enough. Go!"

"Oh, no, my pretty one. When a woman is bound to a man by—you know what—she has not the right to order him about thus."

"Will you go, wretch?"

"That's it, abuse now. Ah! my dear friend, don't upset yourself like this; we have to talk long and seriously, and you will need all your calmness."

"I have paid you, I tell you," shouted Dolores, beside herself with fury. "Go, or else—"

"Or else?"

Like a furious tigress, she sprang on him, her dagger raised.

He was watching her. Self-possessed and still scornful, he seized her wrist and rendered her powerless.

"Don't let's play that game," said he, "you must know that I've taken my precautions. If you had the misfortune to kill me, you would be lost. Information, with proofs, would be given to the authorities before two hours had passed, and your pretty head would run a great risk of receiving attentions at M. Deibler's hands."

Dolores sank shivering on a seat.

"Let's talk like good friends—accomplices," continued Loyal-Francœur, laying stress on the last word. "You loved, you still love, M. Paul Clairac; you are quite right, he is a fine fellow who has everything necessary to please—a wife. But he wanted to marry. That upset your plans, for his betrothed was young and pretty, oh! not so pretty as you, I know; but, at any rate, he liked her."

"What are you driving at?" murmured Dolores.

"You will see. You wanted to prevent this marriage. You applied to



a certain Loyal-Francœur, the director of an agency, No. 13, Rue des Chantres, Dispatch and Secrecy. In consideration of a few wretched thousand-franc notes—a trifle for you—I broke off the marriage, the girl disappeared, leaving nothing behind her but dishonour and shame. The lover, wounded, feeble, and rendered pliable and confiding, fell into your power. You have got back your property, you have gained your object—”

“Well, what is that to you? Did I not pay you?”

“Wait. Breaking off the marriage was nothing. That’s a trifle to the firm of Loyal-Francœur, and if ever divorce is re-established, it will furnish work for the lawyers. But there was an obstacle, a rock, a stumbling-block. A certain Pedrillo, who had been for a long time associated with your destinies, who knew too many secrets, who could with one word have ruined you.”

“Cut it short. What do you want?”

“I like to make things clear. There’s no one listening, is there? We can talk to one another openly? Well, this Pedrillo was in your way—as I am at the present moment—you wanted to rid yourself of him—as you would give a good deal to rid yourself of me, eh?—be frank.”

Dolores did not reply.

“Silence is equivalent to consent, or rather admission. But—I may as well tell you at once—I am not so easily got rid of as your—friend. He was a night-bird, a rake, a gambler. I am a respectable man, I pay my way and have friends, to whom I have confided certain papers.”

“What is all this to me?” said Dolores faintly.

“This: that if you took it into your head to close my mouth, a letter—deposited in a safe place—would inform the authorities that I had been murdered in your house. I told you this just now, but good things will bear repetition.”

“Come, what do you want? What is your object?” asked the princess abruptly.

“You want me to tell you at once. Be it so. Well, I want five hundred thousand francs.”

“Five hundred thousand francs! You are mad.”

“Not at all. I, too, had drawn a picture for myself, in which I had retired to a little country town, rich, honoured, respected. Your support counted for a great deal in this picture, for I reckoned on you to realise it. But you try to trick me. You hide yourself, I have to seek subterfuges to get into your house. I object to this, madame, and I say to you: Beware!”

“Beware? And of what?” said Dolores slowly, casting on the inquiry agent a look full of the most withering scorn.

“Of what! Well, you have plenty of cheek, you have. Well, I prefer it so, the struggle will be more exciting. Of what? Why, of this, my dear lady, that all Pedrillo’s papers, *all*, you understand, all the papers for the sake of which you did not shrink from crime, are in *my* possession, and it is on that account that I intend to deal with you, not as an equal, but as a slave!”

“Oh! wretch! traitor!”

“Wretch! traitor!—What shall I say, then, of you, Dolores, the street-singer, Dolores the frequenter of the squares, arrived at fortune through debauchery and crime, associate of a thief; who, to screen your past life, murdered your accomplice, and who are about to allow an innocent man to suffer for that murder; you who in order to win back a favoured lover have

torn an innocent child from her parents ; you who at the present moment—I know it—have in your house the softened and effeminate object of your passion, Paul Clairac, to whom I might tell everything, and who would despise you as an infamous creature.”

“ Silence, wretch, silence ! ”

“ Pay for my silence, then, if you want me to keep quiet.”

“ Speak ; how much do you want ? ”

The agent was about to reply. He had not time.

“ It is needless, madame,” said the hoarse voice of Paul Clairac, who appeared, staggering and pallid, at the door of the conservatory ; “ it is needless, I have heard all ! ”

### XXXI.

#### HOW A ZINGARA LOVES.

“ PAUL ! ” cried the young woman, desperately.

“ The artist ! ” exclaimed the agent, aghast.

“ I have been there for several minutes,” continued Paul Clairac, in a harsh voice ; “ uneasy at not seeing you, I got up. I heard loud voices and I ran to interpose, to defend you, or at least to call for help if any danger threatened you ; I was there ! and I know what you are, I know into what abyss of shame I have been plunged.”

“ Paul ! ” repeated Dolores, her eyes beseeching, her hands stretched out towards the young man.

“ I heard that a murder has been committed by you, madame, in concert with this man. I heard that she whom I loved, the unfortunate and spotless Jeanne de Rieumes, has been slandered by your orders, torn from her family by you. I heard finally the horrible part I myself have been playing, I, who since, I do not know how long, have been living in your house, at your expense, at the expense of a murderess and a prostitute.”

“ Paul ! ” murmured Dolores, for the third time, throwing herself at Clairac’s feet, “ Paul, mercy !—pity ! ”

“ Oh ! have no fear, madame,” said Clairac, mistaking the meaning of the words, and thinking that Dolores was beseeching him not to betray her. “ Have no fear. Before informing the police of what you are and of what you have done, I will allow you time to escape. You will leave this country, which, by the way, is not yours. And then,” he added bitterly, “ before having the right to say a word, must I not pay you for your care and cordial hospitality ? Allow me, then, to go, madame ; I must go to Paris and procure money. Oh ! have no fear, I have friends, I will sell my pictures, all that I possess, but you shall be liberally repaid.”

He said this in a voice of bitter sarcasm and each word fell like a drop of molten lead on Dolores’ heart, prostrate before him, crushed beneath the weight of grief and shame.

“ Ah ! ” said she, in a voice broken by sobs, “ it is not life I ask, Paul, when I cry to you for mercy, when I implore pity. Life ! What is it to me ? Do you think I would have it without love, do you think I could bear it, beneath your scorn ? No, you do not understand me, or rather you feign not to understand me. What I ask for, Paul, what I ask of you, is not to overwhelm me with those terrible words which you do not feel in your heart, and which break my heart. What I wish, what I long for, is to justify myself.”

"Justify yourself? wretch!"

"Yes, justify myself. For, after all, do I recognise your foolish susceptibilities, your idiotic delicacy? Do I belong to your bastard civilisation, to recognise its rules and subtleties? Away with you!—I'm not a patrician, see you—I'm not one of your aristocratic dolls, cold, calculating, without energy and without heart. I am a child of the sun and of the open air, a child of liberty, born under the canopy of heaven, in the fields.—My mother was Spanish and my father a gipsy. I have in me the hot blood of those children of Egypt, whom no one has ever tamed, and this blood cries out to me: Love! love! live for love and by love!"

"Silence! silence!" murmured Paul, who, at the enthusiasm of this magnificent creature, felt himself carried away by the feelings of an artist, and had difficulty in overcoming his admiration.

"Silence? And why? Before the judges, before the whole world, I will repeat what I have said to you. Woman is born to love and owes to love her whole existence. That is what the old gipsies of my tribe said to me, when they saw me growing up handsome and strong. 'You will love, and your love will be stained with blood; you have the terrible mark on your forehead.' I thought I had found that love, when at the age of fifteen a child of my race, Pedrillo asked me to be his wife—"

"Pedrillo!"

"Yes, Pedrillo; the ancients united us, united us for five years. But, before those five years had elapsed, I had felt that my husband was not the man of whom my ardent soul had dreamt. I, Dolores, the Bohemian, Dolores the dancer, Dolores the street-girl, won a fortune, and that fortune I shared with him, in order that he should no longer demand from me what our marriage law granted him, the law which we must all obey, we, the children of the Sun. I made him rich, count, duke, I obtained orders and crosses for him, real crosses, honoured crosses; I got him a grade, epaulettes and lace, but I wished to win back my liberty, the liberty of my heart."

"But how? by what means?"

"What is that to you? one does not ask the ingot of pure gold with what base earth its vein-stone was soiled. All heads bowed before me. I had a new love and a heart without spot to bring to him whom I should love. This man I met one day. It was you. Ah! you remember, Paul, what transports and what intoxication marked the first days of our passion. You were alarmed and fled, I tried to get you back, but I saw that my love was burdensome to you and I gave you back your liberty. Ah! I had reckoned without the Bohemian's blood which courses through my veins; when I learnt that you were going to be married, when I said to myself that another would be yours, that you would be hers; when I thought that she would possess those treasures of love that you refused me—Ah! no! I could not bear that, I could not allow it to happen."

Speaking thus, Dolores had gradually raised herself up. She was no longer the suppliant woman of a short time back, she was the mistress, the offended queen claiming back her rank, she was the lover demanding her love, the tigress ready to throw herself on her prey. She was beautiful, dreadfully, terribly beautiful. Her ebony hair flowing down over her shoulders, her eyes glittering with a cruel flame, her lips contracted, her hands clenched convulsively, as if the nails were about to shoot from her fingers, to tear to pieces what was before her. Paul looked at her, terrified. Loyal-Franceur, who had been awaiting the conclusion of what he

called "the crisis," and had leant silently against an orange-tree, felt the fascination upon him and dared not move.

"At this thought I became mad. You, you, another's! No. That you should be separated from me, that I should be forced to see you no longer except by chance in the street, as a stranger, was horrible enough, but I bore it; but to see you loved, loving, happy with another! Ah! rather tear out her heart with my nails and eat it!"

"Enough! silence!" murmured Paul.

"My first idea," continued Dolores, without heeding him, "my first idea was to go to the De Rieumes' house, to see this girl and stab her to death. But you would have grieved, and I did not want to see you grieve for another. Then I found a man who pointed out to me a means to displace her. We bought a child of its girl-mother and paid people to say that this child was hers whom you loved. We told you it, in order that, scorn and anger killing your love, you should abandon the marriage which was to make me miserable."

"Then, it is true, it was you?"

"Pedrillo, terrified, blamed me, threatened me. I made away with Pedrillo. He owed me twenty years of wealth and pleasure. I have no remorse. And, besides, it was for you."

"It is fearful, dreadful!"

"I won you back, won you at the price of so much labour and so many crimes. And now you know all, you despise and shun me. Kill me, Paul! But this man, who came to ruin my happiness, this wretch who, for the sake of a few bank-notes which I would not have haggled over, breathed upon my dream and dissipated it like smoke, kill him first, or rather hand him over to the law; I shall be avenged. I shall die content."

"Why, she's mad!" cried Loyal-Francœur, suddenly roused from his ecstacy by this unexpected conclusion.

"Silence!" said Paul, casting a withering glance on the agent. "And it was to crown all these crimes, madame, that you carried me off unconscious, brought me here, far from Paris, into a foreign land—"

"A foreign land, far from Paris!" said Loyal-Francœur. "Not a bit of it. You are in the heart of Paris, my dear sir, in the Avenue Montaigne."

"Ah! you have deceived me to the end!" cried Paul. "I must not remain here a moment longer."

He made for the street door.

"He is going to betray us!" shouted Loyal-Francœur.

"I ought to do so, but I consent to say nothing, at least until you are in a place of safety, on the condition that you restore my betrothed to me. Where is Jeanne?"

"Alas!" began the inquiry-agent.

"Speak, wretch, speak! Why conceal her any longer?"

"I know absolutely nothing of her," said Loyal-Francœur piteously, "she—she escaped."

"Liar!" cried Paul. "Ah! I shall know how to make you speak!"

And he seized the agent by the throat. The latter, stronger than he, unloosed himself and, drawing a loaded revolver from his pocket, pointed it at Clairac's breast. He was about to press the trigger when, bounding like a tigress, Dolores sprang forward and seized the weapon in both hands. It went off. Struck full on the breast, Dolores fell. In spite of himself, Paul bent over her, she was dying. With a convulsive movement Dolores drew Paul towards her and pressed his lips on hers.

"I die for thee," she murmured,—"forgive me."

At the sound of the report the gardener, Manma the negress, and the porter had rushed to the spot. They found Paul supporting the dying Dolores in his arms. Loyal-Francœur had disappeared.

### XXXII.

#### A CHANGE.

HORRIFIED at what he had done, Loyal-Francœur had at once turned his attention to flight. He was fortunate in having left the house before the police arrived. Once in the street, in the open air, he recovered a little self-possession. Arranging his clothes, which had been disordered during the short struggle which he had had with Paul Clairac, he began to reflect on his position as he walked down the Champs-Élysées. What was he to do? There was no mistake now. Paul Clairac knew all and would tell everything to the police commissary who would be summoned to Dolores. The latter, if she were not dead, would confirm the accuser's words. In any case, in default of that, the murder which he had just committed would alone suffice to have him arrested, and, once arrested, he had everything to fear from an investigation. He must fly, but whither? The omnibus from the Porte-Maillot to the Hôtel-de-Ville was passing at full trot. Faithful to his habits, M. Loyal-Francœur clambered up on to the top, where, thanks be to the cold, he found himself alone and began to form his plans. It is to be supposed that he succeeded, for when the omnibus stopped at the corner of the Avenue Victoria the inquiry-agent was wearing his evil smile. He got down hastily and went to the Rue Taille-Pain, to his friend Madame Honoré Broussel's.

Paul Clairac, leaving Dolores to the care of the servants, had gone out to try to overtake and have the assassin arrested. He considered that this was of the most pressing importance, for, Loyal-Francœur once under lock and key, the commissary of police would have time to prosecute his inquiry. Unfortunately the inquiry-agent had got a start, and whilst Paul was looking for him in every direction he was quietly escaping on the top of an omnibus. Paul saw that he was wasting precious time. He entered the commissary's office at the Palais de l'Industrie and in a few words related what had happened, confining himself to the late crime, and not entering into previous details. However, he thought it right to mention the murder of Pedrillo de San-Fernando.

"Oh, the affair for which the Comte de Pringy was arrested," said the cretary, "M. Dauffin has that case in hand."

"M. Dauffin? Where shall I find him?"

"At the Palais, of course, second floor. No.—There, I can't remember, you must ask the guard or doorkeeper."

Clairac rushed to the Palais. All this had taken time, and it was on that fact that Loyal-Francœur had reckoned in preparing his plan of defence. Paul Clairac's arrival, the account which he gave of the terrible scene which he had just witnessed, in which he had even been an actor, produced a startling effect on Dauffin. What! this minute inquiry, this precise evidence, these prolonged examinations, all crumbled away like a badly-

built house at the first breath of the storm. He could not help venturing on a protest.

"But, sir, are you quite certain of all this?" he asked with a kind of terror. "It is very serious, very serious—"

"Do you think that I should trifle with such serious matters?" cried Paul, indignant at this doubt.

"I am rather afraid that he is mad," whispered the magistrate in the chief of police's ear.

"No, for I myself came here, as I told you, with the conviction that this Loyal-Francœur had played the principal part in this affair, and what this young man tells us, only strengthens my opinion."

"Then we were about to hang an innocent man?"

"Unfortunately, yes; that does happen occasionally."

"Then the prestige of the law is done for!"

"Oh, not at all. It is the exception. Besides, you see we have been interrupted by circumstances."

"No matter, it is horrible. What do you think is best to be done?"

"I?" said the chief of police, "nothing, sir. It is for you to decide."

"But yet—"

"Very well, I should begin by releasing, temporarily at least, the present prisoner, and I should not lose a moment in pursuing the other man, the real murderer, who during the time we are wasting here in discussion will possibly have gained the frontier."

"You are right," cried M. Dauffin. "His discharge, quick." He rushed into his room and gave the necessary orders to his clerk, who nearly had a fit from surprise. Then, as if to justify what he had done, he said in the emphatic voice which was usual with him:

"I regret, M. de Pringy, the severity with which appearances have obliged me to treat you. But justice, you see, is never wrong, and we know now the author of all these mysterious misdeeds. We are about to issue orders for the immediate arrest of the inquiry-agent, Loyal-Francœur."

"Loyal-Francœur!" cried Pringy, starting. "Ah! I should have known it. Fool that I am! Will you allow me to go with you, sir? I may be able to be of some use."

"Certainly," said the magistrate.

At the time when these events were happening Gratien Voiville arrived at M. Manuel's. The reporter was more than ever disgusted. From all this case, upon which he had counted so much, and of which he hoped to be able to give an account which would startle Paris, he had as yet only derived material for two little paragraphs which had passed almost unnoticed. It was really not worth his while to perform these prodigies of divination. Every two or three days he went to see his friend the police commissary to know whether he might not at least publish his grand news, and he always obtained the same answer:

"We must wait a little longer."

"But still," he objected, "as the victim is known now; as we are almost certain of knowing the murderer; as this murderer is in prison, what reason have you why I should not speak?"

"I? None. On the contrary, since I am to profit by the honour of the discovery. But the magistrate will not hear of it."

"And what reason does he give?"

"None. Nevertheless, between ourselves, I may tell you that he is under a malign influence; that of the chief of police."

"Nonsense."

"Such is the case. Whilst giving him every credit for a real value, I am forced to confess that the chief has a singular mania. He is a dreamer, with ideas of his own. He says that appearances are often deceitful, that nothing is easier than to get on the wrong track, and that it is in the silence of his room that he discovers the truth about a case; and by the aid of all these precious theories he has arrived at the conclusion that the Comte de Pringy is innocent."

"But it's madness!"

"Perhaps so; perhaps, too, it is only a scheme. You are not unaware that lately several cases have been bungled. The papers have been rather down on the Government about it. Now, the chief of police says that this happened because he was not informed sufficiently soon. 'The district commissary verifies the facts,' he says; 'he goes at it hammer and tongs, and when he has made a mess of it he comes to me. What can I do, when I can only go to work on hearsay? If I had been informed on the first day, perhaps I should have discovered a clue. Now I am altogether off the track.'"

"He is not altogether wrong. But how does that apply?"

"Well, in our case it was I who started; it is quite natural that he should be anxious to prove to me that I have gone wrong."

"But the magistrate should know."

"The magistrate is convinced that Pringy is the culprit. But he doesn't like the papers, and he profits by the other man's suggestions to conceal everything from me."

"Devil take him! And I've got my 'jam' all ready. Just listen."

The reporter began:

"The police have just performed a clever feat, we had almost said a miracle, in discovering a crime which everything conspired to keep a secret, in arresting a murderer to whom his position and the minute precautions taken by him gave every chance of remaining unpunished."

"Not bad, for a beginning," said the commissary, approvingly.

"The discovery of the body follows," continued the reporter; "I describe all the artifices resorted to by the murderer to render it unrecognisable and favour the idea of suicide. But, thanks to the intelligence, we had almost said instinct, of M. Manuel, the commissary of police—"

"Oh, no, my dear fellow, not so much praise."

"I continue by announcing the successive discoveries of the breaking off of the marriage and the abduction of Mademoiselle de Rieumes. Then I describe the duel—the duel of which I was a witness—and which I am obliged to keep a secret, for I gave my word—"

"If you gave your word, how could you—?"

"I gave my word as a friend, not as a journalist. If the thing stood by itself, then I should never say a word about it. But directly it forms part of a whole—"

"Very well reasoned," said M. Manuel, laughing. "Well?"

"Then I come to the accused's journeys, a little digression on this winter excursion; then the letter demanding money, then some remarks upon which I am going to ask you to correct me if necessary. I think they are rather good."

"All right, my dear fellow, all that's not lost. You shall put it in later on."

"Later on, later on ! And if another paper cuts me out ?"

"Well, I really daren't—"

The office boy entered, showing in a telegraph messenger. M. Manuel took the telegram and uttered an exclamation in which astonishment was mixed with anger.

"What's the matter ?" asked the reporter, mechanically.

"Read, read yourself, my dear fellow."

Gratien Voiville took the telegram and read it aloud :

"Case completely changed. Comte de Pringy innocent. Have discovered connection. Await you at 13 Rue des Chantres. Signed : CHIEF OF POLICE."

"It's enough to drive one to desperation !" cried the commissary.

"All my 'copy' lost," said the reporter, dolefully.

"Well, my dear fellow, do as I do. Bear your part in it, and let us both go to the Rue des Chantres ; there's some better coming, perhaps." And off they went.

### XXXIII.

#### TO THE ASSAULT !

"Now, we must not lose a minute," said the chief of police, whilst M. Dauffin, completely adrift, was feverishly cramming his papers into a great leather bag. "Quick, let someone go and fetch Fauvette and Antheaume, and half a dozen men with them. You, sir, sign a warrant ; we may need one. You," turning to the clerk, "help his worship, come, time is passing, every second may help the man to escape."

"Will you allow me to go with you ?" said Pringy, longing for his revenge.

"Certainly. You know the man ; you might be useful to us. Now, sir, are you ready, and can we start ?"

At any other time M. Dauffin would have severely reminded the impetuous police officer of the distance which separated them, and the laws of the hierarchy. But, overcome by this "judicial error," and startled by the suddenness of the revelation which he had just heard, the poor magistrate behaved like one in a dream. He took his bag under his arm, put on his hat, and said in an heroic voice :

"Forward !"

The detectives, commanded by Antheaume and Fauvette, were waiting in the court-yard. They started ; the magistrate and the chief of police leading the way ; Pringy between the two inspectors who had arrested him.

"Well, it's all over, then ?" whispered Antheaume to the count.

"Yes, my good man, and I hope shortly to acknowledge the politeness with which you treated me on my arrest."

"And for the moment you are one of us ?"

"Is it not the duty of every citizen to aid the law ?"

"And, besides, you have your revenge to take on the fellow ?"

"Silence !" ordered the chief ; "here we are near the spot. One minute, to settle our plan of action ; Fauvette !"

Fauvette approached.



"You told me there were several exits, I think?"

"I was told of a private exit."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know. We must look."

"I know it. It is in the Rue Chanoinesse," said Pringy, coming forward.

"I can point out the door to you, if you like."

"Good. The exit must be guarded. Two men advance, to go with this gentleman."

Two detectives stepped forward.

"You will go to the spot which this gentleman will point out to you," said, in a brief tone, the chief of police, who had taken command of the expedition.

"As for the password—wait. M. de Pringy, you have seen Loyal-Francœur, you know him, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give us a short description of his appearance."

"He is a little, old man, rather enfeebled, with a white wig and large goggles."

"Pardon me," interrupted Antheaume, "I know him as being quite different, tall, upright, blue spectacles, black hair—"

"I," said Fauvette, in his turn, "when I saw him he had red hair and green eyes, like a cat's."

"After this it is not easy to settle upon any description," said the chief of police. "In that case there is only one thing to be done: arrest any man who tries to pass."

"Very well, sir, it's understood," said the three detectives.

They went off with the count, who posted them in the Rue Chanoinesse. The remainder of the little band waited in the Rue des Chantres. Pringy soon returned.

"Do you know the way in here?" asked the chief of police.

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Very well, show us the way."

They knocked. The court-yard door opened. On seeing the little band enter, the door-keeper, alarmed, tried to object. One of the detectives closed her mouth with a word:

"The police," said he, in a whisper.

The door-keeper, terrified, drew her head back behind the wicket.

"The staircase which leads to Loyal-Francœur's, inquiry-agent?" said the inspector, in a short voice.

"Staircase B."

"On the second floor, isn't it?"

"Yes, at the far end of the 'collidor.'"

"Is he in?"

"I couldn't say, gentlemen. We don't trouble ourselves about the goings out and comings in of the tenants. Here everyone is free."

"That's enough! Silence!"

The door-keeper retreated crestfallen into her lodge. They mounted the staircase B., to the second floor. The gas was not lighted. One of the detectives took a dark lantern from under his cape, and lighted the way. They stopped before a little door, recognisable by the plate bearing the words: Disputed claims and recoveries. They rang. No one came. Loyal-Francœur was not there. As for Isidore, the little humpbacked clerk was still sleeping soundly in the public-house where Fauvette had

left him. They rang a second and a third time. Then, in a solemn voice, the chief of police pronounced the formal words :

"In the name of the law, open !"

**Not a movement.**

"Burst open the door," ordered the chief.

Two detectives advanced. One of them, a giant, placed his back against the door, and, bending to his task, gave a heave. The other, taking a run, gave a vicious kick near the lock. The wood cracked.

"In the name of the law, open !" cried the chief, in a louder voice.

A second kick caused the door to partially give way. They listened a moment. There seemed to be sounds within.

"Go on, finish it," said the chief of police.

Three or four men stepped forward together and united their efforts ; the door, violently torn from its hinges, fell with a crash. They were in the first room, the one in which the humpback received visitors.

"We must begin by making a search here," said the magistrate.

"No, this room is unimportant. The private room is there, next door," cried the count. "We shall find everything there. But, look, look, look ?"

"What ?" cried the chief of police, the magistrate, Antheaume, and Fauvette, at the same moment.

"Hide your lantern for a second—there ! look ! in that corner !"

And, in fact, through the wall appeared a tiny stream of light ; it was the celebrated hole made by the humpback to watch his master, and through which appeared a jet of light. Gasping, the chief of police clapped his eye to the hole. He saw a shadow moving. Loyal-Francœur was there.

"We've caught the beast in his lair," said the chief of police. "Hurry up, my lads. M. de Pringy, how does this door open ?"

"I don't know. Inside, probably."

"That's a nuisance. But we can't expect to surprise our game. The noise that we made in coming in must have given him warning. If he flies by the other door, he can't fail to fall into the hands of our men. Let's go at it resolutely and quickly. Is that not your opinion, sir ?"

"Yes, quick, quick," said M. Dauffin, much excited.

"Wait a moment ; there are some candles on the chimney-piece ; light them. We want to see our way clearly. Has anyone of you a strong instrument ?"

"We can fetch one," said one of the detectives.

"Run, quickly ; a hammer, a cold chisel, a pair of pincers."

"I have all those at the station ; I had to use all my tools to-day. I'll go and fetch them. It's only a matter of five minutes."

The detective started off at full speed.

"Why didn't we think of that before ?" said the chief, striking his forehead. "This delay may spoil all."

"Nonsense, the house is surrounded."

"Well, how can you tell ? It seems to me that this negligence has spoiled our game."

The detective came back with his box of tools. Three men, with hammers, pincers, and chisel, made a vigorous attack on the door. All at once, the light went out on the other side.

"Hurry up ! hurry up !" cried the chief of police. "He'll escape us."

Their efforts were redoubled. But the door was strong, and lined inside with sheets of iron which turned the chisels. It was a formidable task, and one which demanded all the courage and persistence of the police.

The chief and Pringy, with lights in their hands, bent impatiently over the workers. Fauvette had taken a fire-dog from the hearth, and was using it as a mallet to burst in the plates. Antheaume, his handcuffs ready, held himself prepared to rush forward at the first opportunity. A final blow from the hammer burst the lock. The door flew open.

"Forward!" cried the chief of police, rushing, candle in hand, into the dark room, with the whole party at his heels.

An immense flame illuminated the darkness; at the same moment, a terrible report was heard, and the assailants, hurled backwards with terrible force, fell one over the other. The fire caught a heap of papers piled up in the middle of the room, then spread to the curtains, and threatened to set a light to the whole house.

### XXXIV.

#### M. LOYAL-FRANCŒUR'S LITTLE TRICKS.

THE chief of police was among the first to rise. His beard and hair were singed, but he had no other hurt. Seizing the candle which he had let fall and which had gone out, he went and lighted it at the heap of burning papers and looked around him. Each man felt and examined himself, wondering whether he was safe and sound or where his wound was.

"Now," said the chief, "who among you is fit to work? We have a mission to fulfil here. We can count the wounded and dead afterwards."

"*Sacrebleu!*" said Pringy, "I think my wrist's sprained."

"I'm all right," said Fauvette, "but what a crash!"

"I got a smack in the face," said Antheaume in his turn. "My nose is all swollen up. But that's nothing, I'm good for duty. Unfortunately, there appear to be some worse off than us. I alighted on someone who seems to have had almost enough of it. Hallo! comrade, are you dead?"

"Mercy," replied a doleful voice; "mercy, I'm a harmless man, don't make me responsible for this misunderstanding."

"What's he chattering about? Has the fright sent him off his head? Why," said he, looking closer, "it's the magistrate's clerk—Hi! I say!"

"Ah, good gracious!" said M. Dauffin, who was also uninjured, "the poor man is out of his mind."

"Mercy!" groaned the poor clerk. Then, opening his eyes, he looked with a frightened stare at those around him, recognised the chief of police, the magistrate, and the detectives. His face changed. He rose, brandished his goose-quill with a warlike air and cried: "Where are they, the thieves, the wretches, the dogs, who fired the cannon at us?"

"The cannon!" said Fauvette, who was busy stamping on the burning-papers, so as to prevent a fire. "The cannon! not a bit of it, but a fine gas explosion."

"That is true," remarked the chief of police. "But how did it happen?"

"A leak in the pipe, no doubt," said the magistrate.

"That's impossible. It's not a quarter of an hour since there was a light here: the explosion would have taken place then."

"Wait a minute," cried Antheaume, examining one of the gas-jets which

were hanging twisted by the side of M. Loyal-Francœur's desk. "Look here, it's turned on."

"And the other one too," said Fauvette.

"No doubt about it," said the chief of police. "The wretch turned on both gas-jets before escaping. The gas filled the room, and when we came in with our candles the explosion took place."

"It's lucky we hurried over the job, otherwise it would have been much worse."

"The villain! if I could only get hold of him," cried the clerk, who, since he had satisfied himself that he was unhurt, had become quite bellicose.

"You will soon be able to have that pleasure, my dear sir," said Fauvette, "for if he escaped by the other street, our men must have collared him."

"That's true, by-the-bye," said the chief of police. "They've got him below. Fauvette, go and see what's going on. Monsieur de Pringy will show you the way."

Fauvette went down the backstairs. Two minutes afterwards he came back, his face the picture of despair.

"Well," asked the chief of police, "what's the matter now?"

"Oh! the fools! What do you think they told me?"

"Well, quick!"

"That they have only seen a woman pass, and as they had only had orders to arrest 'the first man that passed,' they didn't think they had any right to arrest her."

"Oh!" cried the chief of police, "the wretch has escaped us again!"

"Your men are not very intelligent," observed M. Dauffin.

"I know that. But how can I help it? I want rough customers and they give me gendarmes, stout fellows, obedient to orders, but ruining the simplest case by excess of devotion. If only I had fifty trained men! Well, the evil is done, it's no use lamenting it now. At least let's make a serious search. Here's a desk."

"Empty, sir," said Antheaume. "While you were talking, I examined it; all the drawers are open and have been emptied."

"Pull them out. Some important document has, perhaps, slipped underneath or behind."

"No fear of that, with these birds. They're more artful than we are."

"Empty the pigeon-holes."

They had to smash the padlocks. But to Pringy's great surprise, the majority of the cards were empty. The few documents that were found were put together to be examined later on.

"And the cupboard. Fauvette, did not the humpback speak of a cupboard?"

"A secret cupboard, yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"We'll sound the walls."

They set to work to tap the walls. The search was not a long one. Under a picture which Fauvette lifted up, the woodwork gave out a hollow sound. They raised the tapestry. The door of the secret recess was not shut. They raised the candles to look; the cupboard still contained a few wigs, one or two bundles of papers, a box containing prepared chalk, rouge, blue, black, sponges, curling-tongs, stumps and haresfeet. But this was all. The rest had been taken away.

"We shall find nothing," said the chief of police. "He has removed everything. Ah! those papers, what are they? Unfasten the covering, Antheaume."

Antheaume obeyed, and a mass of circulars appeared :

NO. 13 RUE DES CHANTRES,  
2nd floor.

DISPATCH AND SECRECY.

LOYAL-FRANCEUR AND CO.

Nephew of and successor to Tricoche,  
Confidential Agency.

Thirty years of success.

"Charming!" said the chief of police, "he has left us his card; there's nothing wanting but P.P.C."

At this moment they heard hurried steps on the stairs. M. Manuel and Gratien Voiville appeared.

"Well?" asked the commissary of the Saint—district.

"Well, my dear colleague, this is what they call in theatrical parlance a 'frost.'"

"What! a failure?"

"Rest contented; there are two men in this case who have to have their revenge. All is not yet over between myself and M. Loyal-Franceur."

Antheaume and Fauvette were right. It was intentionally, by a skilful manœuvre, a veritable masterstroke of strategy, that the fugitive had left the gas escaping, in order to cause confusion among his assailants and allow himself time to escape. When the inquiry-agent, after leaving Madame Wilson's house, where he had just committed a fresh crime, had repaired to his friend's, Madame Honoré Broussel, he had found the house empty. For what reason we shall know later on, and also what influence the mid-wife's absence would have had on M. Loyal-Franceur's decision, had he known the motive of it. But this he did not know. He was therefore satisfied with grumbling a little, and, determining to return later on, he made his way straight to the Rue Chanoinesse. No one had been there as yet. He had time to take his precautions before the arrival of the police, for he was certain that they would come. He went upstairs, opened his desk and pigeon-holes and threw pell-mell into the fire the principal documents, to which he set fire. Whilst the papers were burning, he opened his private cupboard. He took from it the bank-notes, the gold, the jewels, put in his pocket an ebony-handled dagger, and a small revolver destined to take the place of the one that he had dropped in the house in the Champs-Élysées, after having fired upon Dolores. As he was finishing he heard voices downstairs. It was the police arriving. M. Loyal-Franceur was in no doubt about that. But, certain of the stoutness of his locks, he continued his task.

Replacing his black wig by a grey "scratch," he took from the bottom of his drawer a woman's print dress, a bonnet and a large bag. He

crammed into the bag the money, the notes and the papers which he wished to take away, and, by the light of the gas, he began to "make up" his face in front of the glass. He heard the police attacking the first door and did not disturb himself. It was only when they proceeded to lay siege to the second that he thought it was time to fly. Stirring with his foot the papers in the fire-place, which had ceased to flame, he blew out the two jets. The odour of the gas at once became apparent in the room.

"There'll be a nice scene presently," said Loyal, with an ironical laugh.

The door cracked. He took his bag and went out by the secret exit. At the bottom of the stairs he saw two men standing sentinel. His heart beat fast. But he put a good face on it. He went down, shuffling from side to side, as old women do.

"Excuse me, good sirs," said he in his little squeaky voice, and dropping a curtsy.

The two inspectors looked at him.

"Shall we let her pass?" said one of them, suspiciously.

"They said '*a man*,'" remarked the other.

They drew aside. Loyal-Francœur gave a sigh of relief. He walked as far as the corner of the street. There, taking off in the twinkling of an eye his gown, bonnet, and wig, he stuffed them into his bag and walked to the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville. He had passed two or three cabs on the way, and the drivers, seeing him walking hurriedly, with a large bag in his hand, had greeted him with the traditional: "Cab, sir?" But he took no notice of them. He went up to the rank, approached the first cab, opened the door and stepped in.

"The Northern Station," he cried, loudly enough to be plainly heard by all around. The driver jumped down, took the rug from his horse's back, and began to take off the nosebag in which the poor animal was searching for the last grains of corn.

"Quick, quick, I'm in a hurry," said M. Loyal, who had his plan.

The driver looked at him, hastily took off the nosebag, and swung himself up on to his seat.

"Do you know what time the Brussels train goes?" asked the inquiry-agent.

The driver began to laugh.

"Right you are," said he. "But don't be alarmed. It's too late for the 6.20. But, by whipping up my horse a bit, I can catch the 8.15, by Douai."

"Well, drive quickly. You shall have a good tip if we catch it."

The driver lashed his horse and started off.

We have said that Loyal-Francœur had his plan. He was playing a desperate game. In confiding himself thus to a cabman's discretion, he might get himself arrested, but he was certain—and this was what he wanted—of publishing his departure. In order to make surer, once started, he took from his bag two or three letters, trifling letters, referring to business matters. He added to these several bills, folded the whole in one of the celebrated circulars and fastened the parcel with an indiarubber band. He placed this under the cushion, so as to make a lump. Then he took from his bag his woman's bonnet and gown, which he threw on the bottom of the cab, under his feet. They arrived at the station. Springing lightly out, he put a ten-franc piece into the driver's hand, hurried into the waiting-room, followed the gallery, in the midst of a crowd of passengers, and went out again by the yard on the left.

"Let them look for Loyal-Francœur at Brussels now," he muttered.

"They'll find him just about as much there as they will in Paris."

So as not to pass the cabman again, who would have recognised him, he walked quickly down the Rue de Maubeuge and gained the Boulevard de la Chapelle. A tram-car was passing. He got into it. At La Villette he got out, crossed the circus, and entered the Rue Secrétan.

## XXXV.

## HOW INCOGNITOS ARE MANAGED IN PARIS.

THE Rue Secrétan runs directly from the La Villette-circus to one of the gates of the Buttes-Chaumont park. Accordingly the neighbourhood of the magnificent promenade has attracted to this street crowds of workmen, dealers, pastry-cooks, sellers of sweets, nougat, oranges, images, children's toys, and even photographs, "which are produced quickly and faithfully, admirably and surprisingly, for the small sum of one franc." All this busy throng occupies a row of small wooden houses on the left side of the hill; behind is waste land where in summer are set up booths, skittle alleys, roundabouts, and even dancing platforms, and where, on the approach of winter, acrobats come and camp, living there in their waggons with the greatest economy until the time for their country trips comes round again. M. Loyal-Francœur entered this street, still carrying his precious bag in his hand. After having gone a little way past the market, he entered the small space left open between two booths, and arrived at a spot where there was an encampment of mountebanks. A dog barked on seeing him and rushed at him with the evident intention of biting. But the inquiry-agent quieted him with a word:

"Quiet, Lucifer!" he said.—"A friend, old fellow."

Lucifer evidently knew M. Loyal-Francœur, for he ceased barking and gave a joyous whine.

"What's the matter? Who's there?" cried a loud, rough voice.

"It's I, don't be alarmed," said Loyal-Francœur in a low voice.

"Who's I?"

"Why, don't you recognise my voice?"

"I recognise nothing; what's your name?"

"Come," said the inquiry-agent, walking nearer, "you must know that there are occasions when it doesn't do to be too talkative."

"Hullo! it's you, M. Loy—"

"Hush! Open the door of your crib, quick; we'll talk afterwards."

The mountebank opened the door and admitted Loyal-Francœur, who shut it again.

"Well, what's up?" asked the proprietor of the waggon.

"Something serious; but can anyone hear us?"

"No one."

"Well, old fellow, you have before you a man with whom the air of Paris by no means agrees."

"Nonsense! What's happened?"

"Why, that affair—you know."

"What! the *caracho*?"

"They've recognised him."

"How the devil did they do that?" cried the mountebank with surprise.

"I don't know, but so it is, and they know that he has been murdered."

The mountebank turned pale.

"You tell me that and sit there quietly ; you don't warn me at once. But I shall have to go a bit quicker ; I'm off."

"There, there, there," interrupted M. Loyal-Francœur, stopping him.

"You run no risk. It's not the arm that they recognise ; it's the head, and it's for that reason that I, who am in danger, have come to ask for shelter from you, who have nothing to fear."

"Ah ! are you sure ?" said the mountebank, breathing more freely. "But how can they suspect you, you who remained quietly at home whilst we were doing the job ?"

"There's the other matter. The girl, you know."

"The one we kidnapped ? then it was all the same affair ?"

"Yes. Well, she's gone off."

"Impossible ; and she has split ?"

"Just so," said Loyal-Francœur, who did not wish to take his companion entirely into his confidence. "Then there is a third complication ; someone who ran foul of me and whom I shot."

"What ! you did the deed yourself ?"

"That was unfortunately what spoilt all. I'm a fugitive now, and forced to hide myself, if I don't want to get into serious trouble."

"But, at any rate," said the mountebank, with an insinuating air, "you made something of it ?"

"My poor Alcindor, I've been robbed ! absolutely robbed ; I've got nothing, nothing !"

"Nothing, for such an important job ?"

"Nothing. I'm out of pocket by it ; for I paid you in advance."

"A hundred francs ! it was a gift for you !"

"Well, you had the pickings, the contents of his pockets."

"Oh, yes, a great catch !" cried the mountebank, "a fine stroke of luck ! not a louis, not a 'fimsy,' nothing but counters, which would have bowled us out if we had tried to use them."

"Go along !"

"Honour bright."

"Well, at least it didn't do you any harm, whilst I who bore all the expense and trouble, without any return, am risking my head now, and have lost my agency and all my connection."

"Fearful, fearful !" said Alcindor, with an air of compassion. "But what are you going to do ?"

"Change my skin, thanks to your kind protection, and start a new business."

"That requires money."

"I've put by a little."

"Which you've got, no doubt, in yon bag ?" inquired the mountebank, casting a side-glance at it.

Loyal-Francœur intercepted this glance, and began to chuckle in the most natural way possible.

"Ha, ha, my good Alcindor, do you think I should be fool enough to cart my money about ? No, no, my friend. The few sous that I possess are in a safe place. I have only what is strictly necessary, here."

"Anyway, what's your plan ?"

"First of all, as I told you, to alter my phiz. I shall want to dye my skin a bit. Then—have you your cab still ?"



"The one with the movable number?" said Alcindor, laughing. "Yes, it's there, waiting to be used."

"You'll get me half a dozen large trunks, and put on your coachman's costume."

"Right. What for?"

"Simply to take me to an hotel. I shall be a foreigner arriving in Paris with his luggage."

"*Bono chouia*, as the Arabs say. And when do you want to be 'made up'?"

"At once, if possible."

"Nothing is impossible to Alcindor, the only man who works for the different courts of Europe, Africa, Oceania, and a thousand other places," said the mountebank, putting on his professional voice. "Come here, Papa Loyal; in a quarter of an hour your father—if you ever had one—would no longer recognise his child."

"Don't talk so much, but act," said Loyal-Francœur. "What am I to do?"

"Sit down here. There. Don't move, as the photographers say; the operation is about to commence."

As he spoke Alcindor took from a drawer two bottles and some brushes. He began by well soaping M. Loyal-Francœur's face, neck and hands; then, dipping a brush in one of the bottles, he began to daub his face.

"You see," said he, as he went on with his task, "some only use plum-juice for this kind of thing; that's a very mild affair, good enough to play Atar-Gull at the theatre, and nothing more. Others use tincture of iodine with good effect. But, in addition to its burning, there comes a time when it turns violet. I have found after long study that walnut-peel, well distilled, is the best of all. You'll be able to give me your opinion."

"Have you nearly finished?" asked the patient.

"Wait a minute. There's the hair to do yet. No offence, but yours is a beautiful colour. You must have been born when the red poppies were in flower. With my capillary tincture,—trademark S.G.D.G.—I can remedy that. Your hair is as black as a crow's wing now. Just a brush to finish up with. You look like a Milanese or a native of Camebière. Look!"

He held a glass in front of M. Loyal-Francœur, who uttered an exclamation of surprise. He was, in fact, utterly unrecognisable.

"And now," said Alcindor, "listen. A lotion, to be applied every week, is sufficient for the hair. As for the skin, there are two places which wear white: the palm of the hand and the corners of the chin. Be careful of that. When it fades, you will only have to touch yourself up with the brush."

"Now for the cab," said Loyal-Francœur.

"You're in a hurry, then."

"Rather!"

"It'll be best for you to sleep here. We can talk that over to-morrow."

"To-morrow, old fellow, it will be daylight and the police will have had time to move. Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day."

Alcindor Boudillon opened the door, went behind his van, and from a kind of shed, made out of stakes and canvas, pulled out a cab, ramshackle in appearance, but still strong and in a fit state to be used. He furnished it with two numbered lamps, one 685, the other 11,243. In this way any inquisitively disposed person who might wish to find the driver of the cab

again would have two false clues instead of one. Then he went and fetched from another shed a great strong Percheron horse, which he harnessed to the cab.

"How does that suit you?" he asked.

"I want one or two trunks," replied Loyal-Franceur.

"I have some, only they are empty."

"Aren't there any stones here?"

They took the two trunks and crammed them with stones, lit the two lamps, and, with Loyal-Franceur installed inside and Alcindor on the box, they drove off.

"Where to, sir?" said the mountebank, putting on the true cabman's twang.

"I don't know. A good hotel, somewhere Batignolles way. I've never lived there. It'll be a change for me."

"And, besides that, you'll run less risk of meeting any acquaintances?"

"Just so, you sly dog."

"Ha, ha; right you are. Gee up! Cocotte!"

The cab drove off.

### XXXVI.

#### A FRESH IDENTITY.

A QUARTER of an hour later the cab which carried M. Loyal-Franceur and his fortunes pulled up in the Rue des Batignolles, in front of the Sailors' Hotel. Without being luxurious, the house has a very respectable appearance. At the first glance the inquiry-agent saw that Alcindor had made a good choice. Although it was late, the arrival of a cab caused a certain amount of excitement. A waiter in a blue apron came and opened the door, whilst a woman of about thirty appeared on the threshold. M. Loyal-Franceur got out and, addressing this woman, said with a Southern accent, "Could I have a good bedroom here, where I shall be quite quiet?"

"For one night, or for some time, sir?"

"Oh, for a month; more, perhaps, if I am comfortable."

"Come in, sir, I'll show you up. Gustave, take down the gentleman's trunk."

The waiter set about unloading the trunks which the driver complacently handed him.

"Do you require a simple bedroom, or a suite? I happen to have something very nice: a small ante-room, a large bedroom, and an alcove. When you have visitors, you just close the alcove and it becomes a drawing-room."

"What is the price of that?"

"Sixty francs a month, sir, or not less than fifty-five; it's quite a chance."

"Let me see it."

The lady showed the room to the traveller, who examined it, opened and shut the doors of the alcove, tried the action of the curtains and saw that the register acted well.

"It's easy to see that you are from the country," said the landlady, laughing, "you look to all the small details."

"Quite right, madame; I'm used to home life, and so—"

"You will find that here, sir; this is such a quiet house."

"Fifty francs, eh?"

"No, fifty-five, at the lowest."

"Come! Fifty-five francs is not even money."

"I began by making the reduction myself. If you would prefer a simple bedroom?"

"Very well, fifty-five. But you'll give me a fire at least, the first day."

"Certainly. Will you write your name in the book?"

"Yes," said Loyal-Francœur without hesitation; and, taking from the landlady the pen which she handed him, he filled up the official book in a handwriting entirely different from his own:

"Marius Nogale, thirty-five, born at Auch, commercial traveller, from Marseilles." There remained the column which is reserved, or is supposed to be reserved, for the travellers' papers of identity. Loyal-Francœur, or Marius Nogale, since this was his adopted name, asked the landlady:

"Shall I show you my papers? The fact is, they are at the bottom of my trunk."

"Oh, it's a formality. We usually put N. P., that is to say, no papers. If you prefer to enter yours—"

"Then I'll open my trunk?"

"Oh, no, I'll take your word for it."

"Thanks. Then I'll put simply: 'certificate of birth.' That will be enough, won't it?"

"Certainly. Put what you like, for the matter of that."

M. Loyal wrote: "Certificate of birth and passport."

"The driver wants to know whether you have done with him, sir," said the waiter, coming in.

"Ah! I must pay him; quite a journey from the Lyons station here. With luggage, that's worth four francs, eh, madame?"

"And especially as they're heavy," remarked the waiter.

"Well, I'll give him ten francs. He was very obliging."

Loyal-Francœur went down to the cab, gave Alcindor a louis and a ten-franc piece and said pleasantly,

"Here, my man, if ever I come across your cab, I shall always take it in preference to any other. Trust Marius Nogale, for that's my name; I'm very pleased with your services."

"Marius Nogale," repeated Alcindor in a low voice, "right; I'll remember it."

He touched his hat, gathered up his reins, and drove off.

"And now," said Loyal-Francœur, returning to the office, "now my good landlady, if you could send me up something to eat?"

"Whatever you like, sir; cold veal, ham, half a fowl."

"Half a fowl and a bottle of Bordeaux—but good."

"Oh, sir, it comes from Bordeaux itself."

"All right. Send it up quick; I'm dying with hunger."

M. Loyal eat heartily, drank his bottle, went to bed and slept like a man who has nothing to fear or reproach himself with. He woke next morning at seven, dressed, took from his bag paper, pens and ink, and wrote three letters. The first was addressed to "M. Loyal-Francœur inquiry-agent, poste restante, Brussels, Belgium; the others to "M. Marius Nogale, traveller, Sailors' Hôtel, Rue des Batignolles, Paris." On one of these two latter he wrote: "Value one hundred francs," and put five red seals on the back. Then he went down stairs, went to the post-office at the Place de Clichy, where he posted the first two letters and

walked on to the office in the Rue d'Amsterdam, where he registered the third one and walked quietly home to breakfast. By means of the first letter he let the police know of his departure for Brussels, by means of the two others he confirmed his identity at his hotel; by means of the third, the registered one, he created for himself a kind of first document attesting his fresh identity. It may be seen that, like a good player, M. Loyal-Francœur neglected no card in his hand. After a plentiful breakfast, concluding with an excellent cup of coffee and a glass of dry champagne, M. Marius Nogale—since this was the name of the new lodger at the Sailors' Hôtel—M. Marius Nogale called for the papers. They all referred to the event of the day before, but in different terms. Some related separately, and as two cases quite distinct from one another, the Crime in the Avenue Montaigne, and the Explosion in the Rue des Chantres. Two or three, thanks to better information, or a useful hint, set up a connection between the two events, saying that it was subsequent to an attempt at extortion that the inquiry-agent, Loyal-Francœur, had assassinated Madame W., and that, discovered and pursued by the police, he had blown up his office—by dynamite, said one, by picrate of potash, according to another. One only, Gratien Voiville's, who this time was triumphant and had utilised his notes which had been so long held in reserve, one only related almost in full, but in vague terms, the whole story. It referred to the murder of the Count de San-Fernando, attributed for some few days to an honourable gentleman who had since been found innocent, to the abduction of Mademoiselle de X—, the daughter of one of our old generals of the Army of the Rhine; to the duel of the celebrated Paul Z., who had left town in consequence of his wound, and finally to the shot fired by the inquiry-agent, Loyal-Francœur—the name, this time, was in full—at the beautiful Dolores Wilson, because she refused to furnish him with the money necessary for his flight.

In Voiville's account there was no reference to the prominent part played by Dolores. Dolores was dead or dying; the police could ask her no questions. It had therefore been thought that the simplest plan was to leave her on one side and attribute to Loyal-Francœur the whole responsibility of the affair. The Spanish lady was an additional victim, that was all; it all served to thicken the plot.

"Dog!" exclaimed Marius Nogale, after reading this. "And to think that history is written thus!"

Gratien Voiville's account continued with the expedition against the "fortress" in the Rue des Chantres. The reporter did not fail—so as to make his colleagues green with jealousy—to mention his presence and the part he had borne. Every moment the word "we" occurred:

"We get upstairs, we attack the iron-cased door, we penetrate at last into the sanctum, when a terrible explosion takes place. The gas, left to escape by the villainous murderer, had ignited. Several of us are thrown off our feet."

"If only this fellow had broken one or two of his paws!" growled Marius Nogale, interrupting his perusal. "Oh, these journalists, and especially the reporters, what a pest they are!"

"Unfortunately," continued the account, "the murderer had escaped, escaped in spite of a cordon of detectives distributed round the house. It is supposed that he had disguised himself as a woman—"

"They know everything, these brutes!"

"—And had gained the Northern station, where he took the train for

Brussels, the eight o'clock train. It may be seen that we are exact. As a matter of fact, information has been laid before the police by the cabman who drove him, whom he had asked about the trains, and in whose cab he left in his hurry two or three important papers, as well as his feminine disguise. The murderer is therefore at Brussels."

"That's it! They've fallen into the trap," said Loyal-Francœur to himself, with a sigh of relief.

"But he will not remain there long undiscovered. His description has been forwarded to the Public Prosecutor and a search will be made in all the furnished apartments in the Belgian capital. Further details will follow shortly."

"Done, old fellow!" chuckled Loyal-Francœur. "Done! If this is your idea, we'll have the laugh of you, thanks especially to the little letter that I've just sent off. Ah! my bold police, you think it's an easy matter to catch me like that. Well, it's Greek against Greek. It's a stern chase. Loyal-Francœur is dead, and Marius Nogale defies you."

## XXXVII.

### AT FAULT.

A MONTH and a half has elapsed since the events we have just related happened. In spite of the efforts of the police, who had nevertheless set their best detectives to work, they had found it impossible to discover Loyal-Francœur. Deceived by the cabman's story, who had brought the little packet and the clothes "forgotten" in the cab, the magistrate and the chief of police had made up their minds that the murderer had gone to Brussels. The Belgian police had been informed and had in turn made an active search. But they had found not the least trace of the individual described.

There had been a glimmer of hope—namely, when the letter had been received that the ex-agent had addressed to himself at Brussels. A smart detective had been stationed permanently at the post-office. But no one had come to claim the letter. Hoping to find some clue in it, they had obtained legal powers and opened it. It simply warned the addressee that the police were searching for him and told him to take advantage of a ship which was leaving Antwerp for America at the end of the month, telling him that the "person agreed upon" awaited him in the Rue des Herbes to furnish him with a passport. This opened up a fresh clue, which came to nothing, since this information was only a trick on M. Loyal's part. Having received a bullet in her chest, Dolores had died without giving the slightest information. As far as she was concerned, the case perforce was abandoned. A search at the house in the Avenue de Montaigne had led to no result. Finally, when the police had paid her a visit, Madame Broussel, midwife, had forcibly protested her ignorance of the whole affair. Having been called in to attend a young woman who was on the point of becoming a mother, she had conscientiously performed her duty and had accompanied to the mayor's office the young man who had called her in and who had stated that he was the father—she did not know the name of the woman, and, had she known it, professional etiquette would have forbidden her to mention it. After having placed the child under the care of a good nurse, she had troubled herself no more about it. As for Loyal-Francœur, she did not know of the existence of such a person. There was no incriminating this woman. She stood upon her rights. They could not touch her. If they had only known!

The case was, therefore, not abandoned, but temporarily held in suspense. Having lost all trace, the bloodhounds at fault waited, or rather they turned their attention to something else. There is not much time for leisure in the police service. The public had already forgotten the whole business. At the time it had furnished the occasion for much talk. The Comte de San-Fernando's death, the mysterious story of the young girl who had been carried off, the explosion in the Rue des Chantres, had been eagerly dwelt on by the public. The papers had given full accounts of them—the illustrated ones straining the imagination to produce the different scenes—then, as the murderer was not captured, there happened what happened in the case of the Walder, the Passage Saulnier, and the Rue Fontaine crimes—no more was thought of it. A new play at the Variétés with three songs by Judic ; a quarrel between a well-known actor and his manager ; a scandal in a great club, where a gentleman belonging to one of the oldest families in France had been caught in the act of cheating at cards, had taken possession of public opinion. The Loyal-Francœur case had gone to keep company with the old legends ; it was done with. The chief of police, however, had not forgotten it. Nor Paul Clairac either, who had not discovered his betrothed ; nor Colonel de Rieumes, who was bewailing his daughter, and finally, the Comte de Pringy who, accusing himself of having aided in the base deed, thought only of the faults he had committed, and had sworn to devote to this object his fortune and his life, were it necessary. It is needless to say that the colonel and Paul Clairac, on becoming aware of how he had been duped, had granted him free and full forgiveness of the wrong which he had done them. All three were seeking the solution to another problem, more important to them than Loyal-Francœur's capture. They wanted to know what had become of Jeanne. It was certain—the inquiry-agent had declared it to Dolores during the interview which had preceded the murder in the Avenue Montaigne—it was certain that she had been abducted by Loyal-Francœur. But what had he done with her ? He could not have killed her, since he had told Pringy that he engaged to find her again—that is to say, to restore her—in consideration of the sum of two hundred thousand francs. He had therefore concealed her, hidden her away somewhere. Unfortunately they had not been able to capture him and make him confess where. And they anxiously asked themselves whether in his rapid flight he had not left her, alone and succourless, in some hiding-place, where she had died from grief and hunger. The chief of police himself was much puzzled on this point. Especially did he regret the abortive expedition to the Rue des Chantres. And yet had he not undertaken it for the best, and could he under the circumstance have done otherwise ? The man was there. They had only to capture him. It is true they had failed to do so.

So time had passed on. Carnival time arrived. For the last few years this series of fêtes has not had much effect on the streets. On Shrove Tuesday as at Mid Lent, there is nothing to be seen on the Boulevards but an enormous crowd of loafers, who stare in vain for a sight of the masks. But the masks do not come. Here and there are a few women dressed in men's clothes, men wearing ragged gowns and dirty, shapeless hats, or half-a-dozen street urchins dressed in fancy costumes, in which their parents' wardrobes play the principal part ; in the place of cavalcades are hired conveyances, from which a serious-looking gentleman, adorned with

a false nose, distributes bills advertising insect-powder or economical stoves. We have bidden farewell to the joyous procession of the Bacchanalian Queen and the mirth-producing figures with which it delighted the crowd. Every year the Carnival gets nearer to its death-gasp. If it is not dead it is very nearly so. The only sign of life which it continues to give is the series of masked balls at the Opera, the Eden Theatre, Tivoli-Vauxhall or Bullier. There are the happy meeting-places of joyous folks who pawn their last shirt or pair of sheets in order to be able to hire a costume and dance all night before a wearied and dull audience, whilst the next day they awake to find that they have no means left to dance for another year. It was Carnival, then, and three or four masked balls were advertised. At seven o'clock in the evening the "disguised," as they are still called in Paris, began to leave their houses to repair to their different places of amusement. In the new street which skirts the former site of the Tuileries, and which has been formed out of a private garden, some loiterers had assembled round a group. As chance would have it, it happened to be a funny one. It was composed of four young fellows, whose costumes were at least original. One was dressed as a bear, a fact which, having regard to the bitter cold, had some sense in it. Another, with no less an eye to the questions of the day, wore a Chinese costume, with long moustaches and the traditional pigtail, and carried on his shoulder, to look like a rifle, the favourite weapon of Molière's matachins, adorned at the end with a large black flag; the third, wearing a black coat and white tie, had his face painted and tattooed like a Redskin, whilst his hair was of a golden colour; the fourth, in spite of the police order forbidding the assumption of any civil, ecclesiastical, or military costume, or one belonging to a corporate body or administration, was got up as a mute and carried under his arm a little coffin filled with penny cigars, which, from time to time, he threw to the urchins who were following him. It is needless to dwell on the success which the four friends met with. The shouts, hurrahs and bravos were never-ending. The crowd of spectators blocked the road, stopping cabs and other conveyances; it was a veritable triumph.

At the height of the confusion, just as the Black Flag had made a speech to the people, a speech enlivened by the Redskin's guttural cries, the growl of the Bear, and the distribution of cigars by the Mute, a young woman, a work-girl, arrived, and being no doubt in a hurry, tried to force her way through the good-natured crowd. She received nothing at first but chaff and insults. The people who were standing at some distance would not allow anyone to go nearer than they, and those who were close were intent on keeping their places. But the Redskin, having by chance noticed her, interrupted his comrade, elbowed aside two or three spectators, went up to her and politely offered her his vermilion-painted hand. The girl was confused for a moment. Then, overcoming the instinctive feeling of alarm which the unexpected aspect of this strange individual had caused her, she tried to profit by the room which had been made and proceed on her way. But this did not suite the Redskin; seizing, in spite of herself, the poor child by the arm, he drew her to him, muttering in her ear a few hoarse sounds which fairly terrified her. At the same time, the Bear, who had approached, took her by the waist, the Black Flag brandished his warlike weapon, and the Mute dolefully offered his little coffin. Pale, trembling, a prey, in spite of herself, to a feeling of terror and repulsion which she could not overcome, the poor child tried in vain to escape from the four practical jokers. Encouraged by the bravos of the crowd, they surrounded

her and began to drag her along in the midst of a mad dance to the sounds of the Rose Waltz which the Bear yelled cavernously in his cardboard head, and which the Mute accompanied, beating time on his coffin.

"Let me go ! help ! help !" cried the poor girl, terrified.

But the masks paid no attention. On the contrary, her supplications and cries seemed to excite them. They redoubled their dances and songs. The delight of the crowd was at its height. Suddenly a vigorous push scattered the spectators who were crowding to look at the attractive sight. In spite of oaths and resistance, a man made his way to the first rank. In the twinkling of an eye the Bear was sent flying, the Redskin thrown on his back along with the Black Flag, whilst the Mute, elbowed on one side, let go his box, the contents of which were scattered on the ground. It was like a thunderbolt. The four young men got up in a fury and rushed threatening on the man who had appeared so inopportunistically for the enjoyment of their witty amusement. But the latter, without appearing to trouble himself, placed the young girl behind him and, turning to his assailants, stood on his defence. He was not a young man, and his age should have debarred all idea of becoming mixed up in quarrels of this description. To judge by his white hair and grizzly moustache, one would have put his age at sixty, at the least. But his sparkling eye, his broad shoulders, his martial bearing, and above all, the red ribbon which adorned his buttonhole, bore witness to a manly nature, and one for which a struggle, however unequal, had no terrors. He had planted himself firmly, facing his opponents, awaiting their attack, and ready to return it. The Bear was the first to advance to the charge ; a vigorous blow full in his face sent the sham head flying, and the pale and terrified face which appeared in its place wore such an expression of alarm, that the spectators, on seeing it, gave vent to a huge roar of laughter.

"Bravo ! sir !" cried a voice.

The newcomer's cause had triumphed. By a sudden change the crowd, at first disposed to quarrel with him for having interrupted its amusement, had been won over by the cavalier fashion in which he faced his assailants. The Redskin, who was advancing to attack in his turn, reflected and drew back.

"Ah ! he's funking !" cried an urchin.

"He's frightened !"

"Look at the Bear ; what a mug !"

"He hasn't got any mug ; he's lost it."

"True. Down with the Bear !"

"And the Mute ; he's lost his goods."

Half-a-dozen street arabs, kneeling, crawling and lying at full length, were fighting over the "goods." One of them had already got possession of the box, another was dragging at the Bear's head, which, held by a piece of string, was hanging down his back ; a third was trying to get hold of the Black Flag's weapon ; as for the Redskin, he was gesticulating furiously, shaking his golden hair, which scattered a yellow powder abroad. It was on them that the crowd which had adored them a minute ago now turned. They were insulted and hustled, and had nothing left but hasty retreat.



## XXXVIII.

## ISIDORE'S SECRETS.

PROFITTING by this change of attitude, the individual who had thus so fortunately arrived on the scene, led the girl in the direction of the quay, and they soon found themselves alone at the end of the Pont Royal.

"You are rid of those wretches now, my child," said the stranger affectionately. "But they might return. You must get home quickly."

The poor girl was so upset that she could hardly stand. She stammered out a few words of thanks, but she reeled and was obliged to lean on the parapet of the bridge to keep herself from falling. They heard shouts and laughter in the Rue des Tuileries. It was the crowd which was now hustling the four masks.

"Where were you going to, my child?" asked her protector.

"To the Rue Saint-Jacques."

"But that's a long way off, and in your present condition—"

A cab was passing; the stranger made a sign to the driver to stop.

"No," said the girl, quickly collecting herself. "I have recovered, I am strong. I can walk."

"But it is impossible. Get in at once."

The young girl from being deadly pale became scarlet.

"Ah!" cried the stranger suddenly, struck by an idea—"poor child. You have no money, perhaps, to pay for the cab?"

She hung her head.

"I had been to take some work home," she stammered. "They promised to pay me to-morrow."

"But you live at home?"

"My brother is out of work, my mother ill."

A pitying expression came over the stranger's face.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "will you allow me to accompany you home?"

"But sir—" she said, hesitating.

"Oh," he cried, "have no fear. Look at me. I'm old enough to be your father."

"It is not that. But we are so poor, so wretched, now—"

"Well?"

"That my mother would be pained to be seen thus."

"No, my child, for I shall let her know that I respect her as much in misfortune as if she received me in a sumptuous drawing-room. But there, this is no time to talk. There's the crowd coming this way. Get in, quick."

The masks, who had made friends with the crowd again, were, in fact, returning, shouting and singing. He pushed the young girl into the cab and said to the driver:

"Rue Saint-Jacques!"

The cab drove off at a gallop.

Things had sadly changed at the little home in the Rue Saint-Jacques. It no longer wore the smiling aspect which we have seen. Joy and happiness had given place to the most dreary despair. Misfortune had, in fact,

fallen on the little family. When Victor, disgusted at the horrible task which had been demanded from him, had left M. Loyal-Francœur, refusing even to accept the month's salary which was owing to him, refusing the money which would have polluted his fingers, he had not dreamt of the struggle which he would have against fate. In Paris the existence of a clerk is a hard one. Not only does he earn but little for the appearance which he has to keep up, but situations are few and difficult to obtain. When a labourer loses his place he remains idle often for a week or two ; but he gets work again. If a clerk is dismissed, he is obliged to wait six months or a year before he is able to get another situation. And does he get one even then ? In many services, banks, railways, insurance offices, financial companies, they ask : " Where was your last place ? How and why did you leave it ? " And if he says that he has been insulted, degraded, or not paid, the manager says :

" He's insubordinate ; we can't take him."

Moreover, are there not now-a-days, in all private firms, and especially in trade, enormous crowds of foreigners, Germans, Prussians, who snap up all the situations ? They are submissive, modest, quiet, dull even, and ask so little salary ! In the meanwhile the clerk out of a place looks for employment in vain. Wherever he shows his face the door is shut against him, and his means become exhausted. His visits to the pawnbroker's become more and more frequent, until the time arrives when they cease altogether, from having nothing left to take. He struggles long to preserve at least a little linen and a respectable coat to go out in ; then one day after a long fast, he parts with this last resource ; he is lost. And in addition to this, the oppressors of the poor hasten the arrival of misery. There are in Paris two hundred employment agencies which have never found work for a soul. And yet their vermilion-painted panels and flaming posters offer the most brilliant situations. Their sole object is to receive fees of fifty centimes—the highest possible. If, in order to scrape up this sum, the poor wretch with shabby clothes, worn-out boots and faded hat, has gone without breakfast, so much the worse for him. He is lucky even if in the bitter cold or driving rain he is not made to scour Paris in search of a situation which has never existed or which was given to someone else a week before. It is then that, with an empty stomach, jaded legs, soaked to the skin and utterly in despair, he generally comes to the conclusion that there is only one last step to take ; a leap into the Seine and a parish burial. Victor had not yet arrived at this point, but he was well on the way. It is difficult to conceive what havoc a month of enforced idleness causes in a household where the expenses are calculated sou by sou. Victor had left, without drawing his salary, at the end of November, and Madame Borin, who had counted on his salary in order to meet her little debts at the end of the month, was sore put about to settle the baker's, butcher's, pastry-cook's and greengrocer's bills. It seems preposterous, but so it is. They had provided for their most pressing wants by pawning the few trinkets which the family possessed. They had paid everything ; but there was little ready money left. In order to live they had had to pawn the mother's shawl, the daughter's dresses, and the linen.

And Victor looked in vain for work ; the end of December arrived ; the tradesmen had not been paid this time. This became known in the neighbourhood and warnings had been given out to grant no credit to the Borin family. To crown all, the poor mother had fallen ill and it had been necessary to procure the means to pay for a doctor and medicine. The

trifle which Louise earned by her embroidery was not sufficient; they had sold various objects to a neighbouring broker. The doorkeeper had heard of this and had become alarmed for the rent; she had informed the landlord and had made no secret of the fact that if they had not paid by mid-day on the eighth they would not sleep at home that night. The eighth had passed, and they had not paid. The threat of the doorkeeper had not been carried out, but each day came demands, reproaches, insults. They might be turned out at any moment. The situation was alarming. What had especially aggravated poor Madame Borin's illness, was Victor's resignation. Why had he left his master, the good Monsieur Loyal, so kind, so honourable, so charitable? Whatever had he done? Whatever had happened? To these questions Victor had only replied by subterfuges and prevarications. He had left because it was necessary, because his conscience forbade him to remain any longer with this man.

"*This man*; the worthy M. Loyal."

"Ah!" said the poor woman to herself. "Victor has committed some grave fault that he will not tell me of. *Mon Dieu!* not to trust his mother! Let us hope nothing will happen to him."

These thoughts were killing the poor mother, who was far from suspecting the truth. But Victor would tell nothing. He had promised his master to keep silence. Such was the position of the Borin family at the time when the incident happened which we have just related. Madame Borin, seated in her armchair, with a lamp at her side, was trying to knit. But her hands, weakened and trembling from fever, could not guide the needles and kept letting the stitches drop, beside which, she was very uneasy. Louise, who had gone out nearly four hours before, had not returned. Paris is such a dangerous town for a young girl. Supposing some evil had befallen her! Suddenly there was a violent ring. Madame Borin, making an effort, went to open the door and uttered a cry of surprise. It was Louise. But she stopped. A man accompanied her. This man, fortunately, was not young, and his demeanour and kind and open face at once soothed the mother's anxiety.

"Excuse me, madame," said he, "but a little accident, or rather an incident, caused me to encounter your daughter, who spoke of you to me, and I asked permission to come and pay my respects."

"Say rather, sir, that you are the most generous of men," interrupted the young girl, eagerly, "that you saved me from a great danger."

"A danger!" cried Madame Borin.

"Yes, mother, and it was because I told him that we were deserted and wretched that he wished to come here. Listen, listen to what happened to me."

And she told her mother, who was trembling with emotion, of the incident in the Rue des Tuileries and the providential interference of her rescuer.

"Ah! sir, how can I thank you?" said Madame Borin, her eyes swimming with tears.

"Nonsense!" said the stranger, with forced gaiety, "you owe me no thanks. I'm an old soldier; was it not a duty to rescue a woman in peril? It did my rheumatism good to administer chastisement to the scoundrels. And then," he added, in a more serious voice, "I may tell you, madame, that this young girl suddenly reminded me of—another—for whom I mourn—"

"You have lost your daughter!"

"Lost ! yes, and in a terrible way, for I have not even the consolation of going to weep at her grave," said the stranger, in a choking voice, whilst two large tears rolled down over his grizzled moustache.

"Oh, forgive me, sir, for having reminded you of this sad blow."

"And it was for that reason, that, seeing your daughter insulted and ill-treated by some young blackguards, and exposed to the jeers of the crowd, I could not restrain myself from rushing up and driving away her tormentors. But that's enough," he interrupted, with an abruptness too marked to be affected. "I have brought you your daughter back safe and sound ; my duty is over ; I must go."

"Oh, sir, this act will bring you good," cried Madame Borin, not knowing what she said.

"Good fortune. Yes, perhaps. Perhaps, if God has pity on me, he will restore to me her whom I weep for ; but, I forgot, you are unhappy, ill, so your daughter told me ; your son is out of a situation. Here, here is something for your most pressing needs, and let your son come to me to-morrow, or when he likes, for letters to obtain work. Here is my card. Now, good-bye. No, one word more, madame ; will you allow me to kiss this child who makes me think of mine ?"

"Oh, sir !" cried both, much affected.

The poor father approached Louise and took her in his arms. He imprinted on her forehead a kiss which left it wet with tears. Then, tearing himself from this embrace, he opened the door and rushed away.

A few moments later Victor returned, heartbroken, and tired with fruitless walking. They told him what had passed ; showed him the bank-note and the card which the stranger had left. Victor glanced at them and became deadly pale.

"Colonel de Rieumes !" he cried, "the justice of God ! it is he who saves my mother and sister ; the man whose daughter I stole !"

### XXXIX.

#### IN WHICH THE HUMPBACK REAPPEARS.

HORRIFIED at the exclamation which the young man had uttered, Louise and Madame Borin sprang up and looked at him as if demanding an explanation.

"Yes," continued Victor, "I have said it : it is God's punishment upon me. I said when I touched that young girl that I was bringing trouble on my mother and sister. It has come true. And what has happened to-day is a warning from God. I must repair the evil that I have done."

"But what evil have you done, and what young girl are you speaking of ?" asked Madame Borin, in amazement.

"Wait, mother. You shall know everything later. Do not demand now a confession which would crush me with grief and shame, and I have need of all my courage and all my strength."

"Oh !" said the poor woman. "I was afraid that you had done something serious to that good M. Loyal !"

"M. Loyal !" cried the young man, bitterly, "that good M. Loyal ! Yes, so he was called here. So many others called him, no doubt. Those

who do not know him, those who have not seen through the mask of hypocrisy beneath which Loyal-Francœur conceals himself, the thief and assassin !”

“What are you saying? You are mad.”

“No, mother. But I beg you again, I repeat, do not ask me more. One day you shall know all and shall know that if I was wrong it was owing to the man whom you honour as a saint, to him whom, at the peril of my life, the sacrifice of my liberty, I shall and must unmask in the sight of the whole world. Good-bye, mother. You have the wherewithal to live for some few days, you and my sister. Those few days should be sufficient for me to do my duty and perform my task. He rose and walked towards the door.

“Victor !” cried the two women in a supplicating voice.

“Kiss me, mother ; and you too, my sister, and pray God to give me the courage and the strength to go through with it to the end.”

Tearing himself from their arms, he rushed downstairs, escaping like a madman, without turning his head.

“Look out, *sacrebleu* !” screamed a squeaky voice, “you nearly smashed me.”

“Isidore !” cried Victor, recognising M. Loyal’s late clerk, “you here !”

“M. Victor !” exclaimed the humpback in turn. “Why, I was just coming to your place.”

“To my place ?”

“Certainly ! Why not ? You’ll be none the worse for it. I’ve got some fine things to tell you.”

“I must ask you to excuse me, my friend. But I am in a hurry, I have far to go.”

“Well, if you’re going a long way, we’ll go together. I tell you, I’ve got some news for you.”

An idea struck the young man. Of what could Isidore wish to speak to him, if not of Loyal-Francœur ? Perhaps what he had to say might be of some use.”

“All right,” said he. “What have you to tell me ?”

“In the first place, I must tell you that I’m in a terrible fix. Ever since the disappearance of that scoundrel—”

“But who ? Who are you talking about ?”

“Why, of the master, of course. You must know he has cut.”

“What ? M. Loyal-Francœur ?”

“Wherever have you been ? Don’t you read the papers ? The police are after him.”

It was true. In their distress neither Victor nor his mother had concerned themselves about what had passed outside. They had been without papers, even halfpenny papers, that intellectual manna of the poor.

“Then it wasn’t on account of the catastrophe that you left the shop ?” asked the humpback.

“No, I resigned.”

“Ah, well, I’ve plenty to tell you. You must know that for several days past the gov’nor hadn’t been easy. He went backwards and forwards and used to stop out all day. I kept house and sent the clients off. But I promised myself to profit some day by his absence and have a look at his cupboard.”

“What cupboard ?” asked Victor.

“A secret cupboard that I discovered by means of a hole I made in the

wall. He used to cram it with things—papers, parcels. I'd got the idea of making an inventory of them. But one day comes a client who introduces himself as a seedsman from Montrouge—”

“Well?”

“Well, this client carries me off to the public-house. I don't like drinking, and consequently I can't stand much of it. He forces me to swallow half a dozen glasses of brandy—”

“Was that all?”

“Yes; naturally I go under the table. And do you know who the Montrouge seedsman was? A detective, my dear sir, an inspector of police.”

“You don't say so! Well?”

“Well, it seems he had made me talk, for two hours afterwards the police made a raid on the house. But the gov'nor's a sly dog, as you know. He was waiting for them with a cannon.”

“What! a cannon!” cried Victor, amazed.

“Yes, a cannon, loaded with grape-shot, which he fired at them; so at least the doorkeeper told me the next day, when, having got sober again, I came back to the office and found everything upside down, broken, smashed, demolished.”

“And he—Loyal-Francœur?”

“He? he had escaped, of course. And it was then they found out everything; that he had murdered a man, carried off a girl, stolen, forged, and I don't know what besides. Ah! when I think that I might have been—that I might still be—involved in all this—”

“But where is he? Does anyone know?”

“Hush! According to the information furnished by the police, everyone thinks he's in Belgium; but I'm artful too, and I'm certain he hasn't left Paris.”

“What?”

“Hush! You know he owed me my wages, that he had forgotten to pay me before going off. Besides that, he ruined me, the scoundrel, for he emptied the celebrated cupboard.”

“Well, you were saying—”

“I swore vengeance, and all the more because, as I told you when I met you, I'm in a terrible fix.”

“Yes, I know, but—”

“And, for the matter of that, according to what your doorkeeper told me, you don't seem to be overburdened with money either.”

“No, certainly not. But go on.”

“Well, I wanted to be revenged on Loyal-Francœur; I should have liked to see him in quod, dragged before the magistrate in handcuffs. Unfortunately he was in Belgium—at least, according to what they said.”

“Well, what happened?”

“This happened; that I was walking mournfully along the Rue Vivienne, when all at once, at the corner of the Rue Colbert—”

“Go on.”

“I espy a man. Oh! it was no use his staining his skin and painting himself; a man doesn't work five years for his master and then not know him; and especially ours, who often disguised himself, and whom I was used to see ‘made up.’”

“Then you think it was Loyal-Francœur?”

“I don't think, I'm certain. So I say to myself: you, an honest man,

may be involved in this rascal's affairs. If you get the police to nab him, that will be a point in your favour."

"Well?"

"Well, I begin to look out for a policeman, of course not losing sight of my man. But, as you know, it's always the case, when you don't want a policeman there's always one there, and when you do want one you never can find one. And all the time my man is going towards the boulevard. I hurry along, determined not to lose sight of him. But when he gets to No. 36 Rue Vivienne, he goes in and walks upstairs."

"Where was he going to there?"

"That's what I asked myself. In any case, I waited at the door. Half an hour passed; an hour. No one came out. I bethink me of a trick that he had taught me himself and that he had learnt from Canler, the old chief of police. I throw a pocket-book into the mud and take it upstairs: 'Sir,' I say to the doorkeeper, 'I found a pocket-book on the ground just now, and I think it belongs to a gentleman who came in here; he was tall and dark. You couldn't tell me where he went?'"

"Oh, my lad," he says, "if you want to catch him, you must put on your seven-league boots, for it's half an hour at least since he went out through the passage."

"What! by the passage?" cried Victor, amazed.

"Yes, by the passage. The house has two exits. My dog of a master had recognised me; and, finding himself followed, had played me a trick."

"So that all that you did only ended in nothing?"

"Excuse me. I know that Loyal-Francœur in Paris; only, that is where I want your advice. I don't know anything about the law; I don't know whether his affairs compromise me. I'm afraid that if I went and informed the police, I should get myself locked up."

"That is not probable."

"Well, truth is stranger than fiction, as the poet says—I don't know which one; Bossuet, I think. If the detective who made me drunk should spot me—"

"Then what do you wish?"

"That you, who are not mixed up in his business as I am, should make inquiries. If we've nothing to fear, I'll start on the campaign; I'm certain the thief will be prowling about the Bourse; I shall nab him."

"Very well, in a few hours from now I'll give you an answer, for I'm going now to Colonel de Rieumes."

"Colonel de Rieumes! Nonsense."

"And if he doesn't kill me, as he has a perfect right to do, I may be able to help you."

## XL.

### A PAINFUL CONFESSION.

"AND supposing I went with you?" said the humpback

"You? What to do?"

"I know the mas—the scoundrel Loyal-Francœur—well. I'm the man to find him out, no matter under what disguise he is; I'll offer my services to catch him. I've nothing to do just now, and I want to make something to live on."

"Very well. It's not for me to advise you."

They walked to the Rue Bellechasse. The nearer they approached, the gloomier Victor became. He did not even hear his companion, who was chattering away ceaselessly. They arrived at the gates. Victor stopped.

"I dare not," he muttered, in despair.

"Come, come!" cried Isidore. "Let me. I'll speak first. I'll engage it will go off all right."

And, saying this, he gave the bell a vigorous pull. The door was opened wide, and the porter appeared at the door of his lodge.

"Colonel de Rieumes?" asked the hump-back.

"Whom shall I announce?"

"Two clerks, late of the Loyal-Francoeur agency, No. 13 Rue des Chantres, on a matter of importance," said the little man, with assurance.

The porter looked at him amazed. But he rang twice, and a footman appeared, to whom he imparted the singular recommendation with which the visitors had demanded audience. Colonel de Rieumes was in the little room where we saw the Comte de Pringy tell Paul Clairac of his journey to Charly. The poor colonel no longer visited his studio; and his garden, formerly so carefully looked after, was forgotten now. He remained there, passing hours in a state of complete stupor, thinking of his daughter, of his Jeanne, whom he still dreamt of seeing again. On returning home that evening after a day of fruitless wandering, he had found Clairac and Pringy, who were awaiting for him, uneasy at his late return, and fearing some fresh catastrophe.

"The kiss which that child gave me," he said, "has comforted me to an extent that I had never expected again. It seemed to me that I had found my daughter, and that I was giving her the kiss that she came and asked me for every evening before she went to bed. It is strange; the impression has remained with me; I believe that it will bring me luck, that I am going to hear some news of her; something, I know not what—"

The door opened. The footman announced the two visitors.

"What did I tell you? These two men know something, perhaps. Quick, quick, show them in!"

The footman withdrew. Isidore entered the room first, preceding Victor, who was pale and trembling. The humpback, on the contrary, had a smile on his lips. He was as proud and full of assurance now, as we have seen him humble and timid in his master's waiting-room. He looked at the three men, and recognised Pringy.

"Ah! M. le comte," said he. "What a lucky chance to meet you again!"

"You, here?" cried Pringy, amazed.

"Certainly, ready to place myself at your service, if it is in my power, and desirous at present to speak to M. de Rieumes. If you would be good enough to introduce me—"

"It is needless," interrupted the colonel; "what is your pleasure with me, gentlemen? I am Colonel de Rieumes."

"Then, colonel," said the humpback, putting on an important air, "allow me first of all to introduce to you my friend Victor Borin, one of the former clerks—"

"Victor Borin!" cried Pringy, "why, it was you—you who—"

"I who signed the birth certificate of the supposed child of Mademoiselle de Rieumes. Alas! yes, sir," said Victor, stepping forward. "And unfortunately that is not the only crime that I have to reproach myself with."



"What do you mean?" asked the colonel, who had turned deadly pale. "That it was I," murmured Victor, in a low voice, "that it was I who helped to carry off your daughter."

"Wretched man!" shouted the colonel, rushing at him with clenched fists.

Clairac and Pringy held him back. Victor, on his part, did not move.

"Wretched, yes, sir, very wretched. Beat me, kill me, hand me over to the police," he continued; "I shall not complain, I shall submit to the punishment that I have deserved. But, know this, sir; I am very guilty, but I am still more unhappy."

"But, at least, where is she? What have you done with her? Tell me what has become of her. Give her back to me, and I will forgive all, and will bless you," cried the unhappy father, bursting into tears.

The young man hung his head.

"Speak; why don't you speak?"

"Alas! sir, God is my witness that I would give my life to be able to restore your daughter to you. For you do not yet know who I am; you do not know that the girl whom you rescued, whom, an hour since, you took back to her mother, that girl was my sister Louise. Well, sir, by my mother's head, by my sister's life, I swear to you that I do not know what has become of your daughter."

"But that wretch Loyal-Francœur, whose tool you were—"

"Loyal-Francœur knows no more than I do."

"How so?"

"During the very night following her abduction Mademoiselle de Rieumes escaped."

"Escaped!" cried Pringy, Paul, and the colonel, with one voice.

"Escaped, by jumping out of a window, and climbing over a fence. In spite of every effort, Loyal could never find a trace of her."

"And you?"

"I who was ordered to guard her, and who already repented of my evil deed, I did not attempt to interfere in her flight. If I had found her, it would have been to bring her back here."

"Oh! what misfortune and grief would have been avoided! But why did you not make this confession before!"

"Alas! sir, in the first place, because, after having quarrelled with my master on the same day that he found out that his prisoner had disappeared, I promised on my honour not to betray him; next, because I was ignorant of what had passed, and because it needed your kind action to make me abandon the forced neutrality which I had observed."

"But what was your object? What interest had you in doing what you did?"

"It is a long and painful confession. Will you hear it?"

The colonel made a sign of assent. Victor then shortly related his history. He told how, being a young student and mad after pleasure, he had foolishly squandered the money which his mother had sent him, at the same time depriving herself of everything; how he had contracted debts; how, in order to renew a bill, he had recopied the signatures, saying to himself that the credit which was offered him for three months might well be extended to six. He would pay, and then all would be safe. But the bills had fallen into Loyal-Francœur's hands, who had made him his slave. Employed at first at quiet and honest work, he had believed in his benefactor's sympathy; then he had been required to perform strange tasks, Loyal-Francœur one fine day ordering him to declare himself the father of

a child which a poor deserted girl had just given birth to in Madame Broussel's house.

"And you consented?" asked the colonel.

"I was obliged to do so. In the first place, I was told that it was a matter of no importance. Then, I had brought my mother and sister to Paris. They were living happily in the little home which you, sir, have seen. Could I, with one word, wreck this peaceful existence? And, besides, what did it matter to me?"

"And this child is the one at Charly?" asked Pringy.

"Yes, sir. But that was nothing. Soon afterwards my master told me plainly that the mother (the supposed mother) of the child whose father I had declared myself to be was about to leave her home and come to me. He told me that she would willingly marry me in order to appear to repair her fault, and that I should in this way shortly be the possessor of a fortune. 'You will give me half of it for my trouble,' he said, 'and you'll be happy into the bargain.'"

"And upon what did he base this promise that you should marry this girl, who was rich, well-connected, and much above you? How did he profess to be able to force her to leave her family, as he had promised you he would do? By carrying her off, no doubt, as you ultimately did?"

"No. At first his plan was different. Having—I know not how—procured a letter written by Mademoiselle de Rieumes, he had had the writing imitated and had thus manufactured a damaging correspondence. By taking a wax impression he had produced the De Rieumes' arms. With all this he intended to compromise Mademoiselle Jeanne in the eyes of her lover, and of the world afterwards, if that was not sufficient, and he promised me that, the marriage once broken off, she would only be too happy to accept me, me who appeared to be doing her the favour. M. de Pringy's interference altered all these plans. Loyal-Francœur found in him a medium all ready to hand, a voluntary agent who would run less risk of compromising the plan and taking all the onus upon himself in case of accidents or discovery. Thrusting M. de Pringy forward, he risked all to gain all, and ordered me to abduct the young lady."

"And you never thought of revealing this horrible plot?"

"I was under the domination of this man; I dared not plunge my mother and sister into misery; and lastly I did not know the name of this rich girl who was to become my wife, or rather my accomplice."

"And when did you learn it?"

"On the day of the abduction. My master brought me to the door of this house, gave me a letter and told me what I had to do. Entice a young girl out, so as to put her in his power. If there had been a failure he would have escaped and I should have been captured. If successful, he was to go off in a cab and I was to go and await him in the little house at Nogent-sur-Marne, where the prisoner was to be lodged until further orders."

"Well?"

"Things happened as Loyal-Francœur had arranged. Mademoiselle de Rieumes came down. I got her into the cab and hurried to the Vincennes station on my way to Nogent. There I received her. Upon my life, sir, I treated her with all the respect and all the regard that she deserved. When speaking to her I thought of my own sister. I regretted what I had done. The next day, when Loyal-Francœur arrived, she had escaped. There was a scene between us, and I left. Only a few minutes since I heard from this boy, with whom I came here, what happened afterwards,"

"My friend has finished, allow me to appear again," said the humpback, who had listened in silence to Victor's story, but who was by no means unwilling to take up the parable.

"Speak, sir," said the colonel.

"You know my modest functions, M. de Pringy. But, in spite of them, I knew many secrets, and to you, who had always shown yourself kind and generous towards me, I promised a revelation."

"What is it?"

"I wanted to tell you, first of all, that you were being tricked and drawn into a snare; then, that if you would promise me independence later on, I would reveal to you a fearful machination against respectable people."

"And you did not do so?"

"I never saw you again. You had been arrested, and I did not know it. If it had not been for that, I should have let this cat out of the bag at once, for I wasn't so fond of my master, who was always ill-treating me and hardly gave me enough to eat. But it was principally the old witch that I wanted to have nabbed."

"What witch?"

"Why, Widow Broussel, the gov'nor's mistress. She must have plenty on her conscience. But what's done's done, isn't it?"

"But can they get nothing out of this woman?"

"No. But they can get Loyal-Francœur."

"What! didn't he escape?"

"Escape! I met him yesterday in Paris, near the Bourse; I recognised him, and if you like—"

"We must go and inform the police."

"Oh, yes, and have us nabbed as accomplices, me and Victor."

"We promise you impunity, at least for the present, and a handsom reward afterwards if you succeed," cried Pringy.

"Right! Then that's settled. I'll set out on the war path." \*

## XLI.

### WHAT MADAME BROUSSEL WAS DOING.

MADAME HONORÉ BROUSSEL, "the old witch," as the humpback called her and there was no love lost between the two—was very sad. Although a midwife and a somnambulist, a woman must have a heart just the same. And it is just when one is past forty, that this heart, having no longer any hope of a resting-place, becomes more easily disconsolate.

Madame Honoré Broussel, midwife and somnambulist, loved Loyal-Francœur, and the absence of "pet" made "ducky" very miserable. The caresses of Marquis, the fat, wheezy pug, did not suffice to fill the void which the precipitate departure of the inquiry-agent made in Madame Honoré's soul. Rum and *Kirsch*, those two consolations of the united lovers, did not heal the wounds of that bleeding heart. What had become of "pet?" He was a fugitive, unhappy, in danger, perhaps. Perhaps, too, he was living happily in a foreign land, enjoying, and allowing another than she to profit by, the economies which he had promised his "ducky" to share with her. Would he ever return, the ungrateful man? One thing only consoled Madame Honoré in her bitter grief; a mysterious adventure which had happened to her on the same day as the catastrophe which had separated

her from her fondly loved one. That day her cousin, a worthy rag-picker known in the Cité Maupy as "Mother Comfort," had asked her to go and visit her. Madame Honoré Broussel was rather annoyed at this relationship, which she looked at in the light of a nuisance. There are many good folks in Paris who are in the same case, and who blush to have work-people in their family, to whom they are glad enough to have recourse in time of need. Such is the way of the world. Accordingly, Madame Honoré saw as little of the rag-picking cousin as possible; but it was exactly for that reason that, at the first call, she obeyed the summons, fearful lest an ill-timed visit might compromise her. What a deplorable effect would have been produced in the Rue Taille-Pain, if a rag-picker calling Madame Broussel "cousin" had appeared. The midwife had accordingly hurried off to Montmartre, little imagining what "Mother Comfort" wanted with her. She had taken Marquis with her, for whom a little exercise was necessary, for he was growing too fat. On passing through the grand entrance, or rather the breach, which leads to the Cité Maupy, Madame Broussel blew her nose and took from her muff a small bottle of smelling-salts, a fact which drew upon her the attention of a young rag-picker who was passing.

"What people! However can anyone live in such places?" muttered the midwife, sighing. She made her way, nevertheless, to her cousin's house. But she only found there an urchin playing at knuckle-bones.

"Madame Victoire in?" she asked.

"Madame Victoire? Who's that? Mother Comfort? she's not here, she's with the little lady, at the Bear's."

"Will you take me there, my little lad?"

"I can't, I'm taking care of the house; but I'll show you it."

He pointed out Prosper Martin's cabin. The midwife made her way thither, grumbling. "What's her game, with her 'little lady?'" said she. "Well, we shall see."

Great was her surprise when she pushed open the door of the dwelling. On the young rag-picker's bed, well covered up with a woollen blanket, was stretched a girl, pale, motionless, and looking like a corpse. At the bedside Victoire—Mother Comfort—was preparing a diet drink. Standing near, wringing his hands, was a young man in rough working-clothes.

"Oh! here you are at last!" said the rag-picker.

"What is it? what's the matter?" asked the midwife, prudently keeping near the door.

"Well, come in, and I'll tell you."

"I hope that young woman there hasn't died of an infectious disease?"

"What, *sacrebleu*! She isn't dead at all, and, what's more I hope she isn't going to die!" cried the *ex-vivandière*.

"All right, but what's the matter with her? Here, Marquis!" cried the fat woman in terror, seeing her pug go to the bed and stand up on his hind legs to look at Jeanne, for it was she who was there.

"Are you afraid for your dog's sake?" said Prosper Martin, with mournful sarcasm.

"How can I tell? everything stinks so in this sewer, that the poor creature might easily take home some infection."

The rag-picker shrugged his shoulders. Madame Honoré Broussel, furious at this want of politeness, was about to give him some of her mind, but the *ex-vivandière* interposed.

"*Mille bombes!*" she cried; "are you going to have a row now? Be

quiet, Martin; you must excuse him, cousin, he's a good fellow, but his 'inducation's' rather rustic. There, that's enough, you and your dog, there's no danger, you must know that if there's any infection, we should catch it before you."

"But tell me—"

"*Mille diables!* how can I tell you when you stand there like a stuck pig at the open door? Are you coming in, or are you going to sling your hook?"

Madame Broussel made up her mind. She entered, and sat down, though at a respectful distance from the bed where the patient was lying.

"Oh, there's nothing to hurt you!" cried the rag-picker. "Now, listen to me."

"Yes, but who is this girl?"

"Oh, if you want to go faster than the fiddles, we shall never dance in time. Let me tell my own story; you'll know as much as me then."

"Go on."

"Well this girl's a novel. No, that's to say, her adventure's one. She's been here six days and we don't know where she comes from."

"What, you don't know her name?"

"I don't know her name nor her birth,' as the tambour-major's wife of my regiment used to sing—the brave Sixth of the Line, the heroes of Inkermann—but, to return to the girl. Fancy, six days ago—my friend Prosper Martin, *alias* 'the bear,' here present—salute! conscript!"

Martin nodded.

"My friend Martin, then, was doing his usual philosophical round on the outer boulevard. What should he see? This girl in a faint. He picks her up, brings her here, and asks advice of my sagacity what he shall do with her."

"All right; well?"

"Well, we settled that we'd keep her 'until farther orders,' as the fat major used to say when he tied a man up, until which time we're taking care of her, like our own child. But we should be glad to know a little about her."

"And was it for that you sent for me?"

"Exactly so, Bertrand,' as the serjeant-at-arms used to say. We're a little separated from the rest of the world here, and I thought that you, who are used to better society than us, might know something. This young girl belongs to the aristocrats; she hasn't got big hands and a tanned skin, like us. Now swell young ladies don't run about the streets of Paris at night without some serious reason. There's some drama or love romance in it all. You read the papers and mix with the swells, and I thought you might have heard tell of it."

Although Madame Honoré Broussel was not quite acquainted with her friend's operations, she was not unaware that he was at that time concocting some grand stroke of business in which a young girl played an important part. She had heard him refer to this girl a dozen times, but he had never mentioned her name. But this was quite sufficient for the idea to strike her at once, that the dying girl who was lying before her on the bed had been involved in the adventure through some machination of Loyal-Francœur's. At any rate, there was some mystery about it, and the inquiry-agent could turn mysteries to account. She must therefore not let this excellent opportunity pass.

"You were quite right," said she in a milder voice. "You were quite right, my good Victoire, to think of me. I know some people who will be

able to find out all about this mystery. Trust yourself to me, and, above all, don't speak to anyone else about it."

"No fear!" said the rag-picker. "Look here, if I'm not learned, I've had plenty of experience of the world. It's one of two things; either this girl has run away to escape from cruel parents, and in that case it's not good enough to 'round' on her in the state she is, for fear the excitement should kill her; or else she has been abducted like in the plays at the Porte-Saint-Martin, and we must look out she doesn't fall into her enemies' hands again. So she mustn't move from here, where there's a whole battalion to defend her, before she is conscious. Unfortunately, she may die without speaking, and we should be embarrassed and even in fault. That's why it would be a good thing to get to know something about her."

"And this is what you wanted me to do? Right. I'll undertake it. You can count on me. Within a week you shall be posted."

The midwife called to Marquis, who had laid himself down under the bed, and went out, after bowing to Martin. She was overflowing with secret joy at the thought of the surprise which she would give her "pet" by telling him what she had seen and heard. Her impatience was so great that, in spite of her economical habits, she took a cab for herself and Marquis. But "pet" did not come that evening, and the next morning, on opening her paper, Madame Honoré Broussel came across the account of the explosion in the Rue des Chantres and the charge which was hanging over M. Loyal-Francoeur's head. She narrowly escaped having a fit. Her "pet" a criminal, pursued by the police! What would become of her? But there exists between pure souls a bond of sympathy which nothing can sunder. Madame Honoré said to herself that Loyal-Francoeur would return to her one day, and that, as a gift of welcome, she would tell him about the dying girl at the Cité Maupy. Ah! as we have already said, if M. Loyal had only known that!

## XLII.

### THE MEETING.

BUT M. Loyal did not know it. M. Loyal, who had become M. Marius Nogale, a native of Auch, in Gascony, was making active preparations to resume his place in the hidden life of Paris. M. Marius Nogale during a fortnight had contented himself with walking about and with taking in the letters which he addressed to himself. At the end of that time he began to be tired of this do-nothing life. He went downstairs and took his landlady's advice on the subject.

"Where can I get information as to employing some capital?" he asked.

So much simplicity amazed the landlady.

"Why, at the offices of investment of course, sir."

"They told me at home to be on my guard with them," said M. Nogale shrewdly.

"They were right, perhaps. Then you should look at the *Petites affiches*, the special papers. You wish to settle here, then?"

"Yes, if I could find a situation, or a little business to be disposed of."

"What sort of business?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter. What I want especially is something to occupy me." The truth is that Marius Nogale, or if the reader prefers it, M. Loyal-Francœur, in pursuance of his plan, wanted to establish the fact that he was new to Parisian life. Pretending to follow his landlady's advice, he dressed himself and said that he was going to the Passage de l'Opera, to consult the *Petites affiches* and advertisements, in a reading-room. After a careful examination of his hair and face, after having satisfied himself that he was perfectly unrecognisable, he walked as far as the Place Clichy and followed the outer boulevard in order to gain the Place Pigalle, where he intended to take an omnibus. His plan was to profit by his metamorphosis to take a little turn round the old neighbourhood, to see what was going on in the Rue des Chantres, to try and learn something, and, in sum, to satisfy himself that no one knew him, and whether he could really walk freely about Paris on any future occasion. M. Loyal-Francœur was a man of boundless audacity. He had become interested in the game, and the bold idea had grown upon him of settling, under his new name, in the Rue des Chantres, in his old offices! Audacious it was, but perhaps not so much so as one might imagine. Who could boast of knowing well M. Loyal-Francœur's real face? He generally appeared before his clients a bent old man with white hair, or else a man of a certain age. In any case, whatever appearance he assumed, his shining green eyes, which would have been noticed at once, were always hidden by spectacles which dimmed their keenness. Who, then, in the young copper-coloured south-countryman would recognise the Loyal-Francœur of former days? The police? The police!—would they even dream of looking for the fugitive in the Rue des Chantres?

"Well, it's settled," he said to himself, turning the corner of the boulevard. "I'll walk quietly along as far as the Pont-Neuf; from there I'll follow the quay, taking my precautions, and gain the Hôtel-de-Ville. If the Rue des Chantres, as I imagine will be the case, is not guarded by police—there's no work for them there, at any-rate—I'll walk boldly in and ask the doorkeeper about the rooms. If she seems to recognise me, I'm off. If not, I'll take the place. I'll set up at first an office for the buying of pawn-tickets; then I'll gradually get into business again. In six months from now we shall have new circulars out: "'No 13, Rue des Chantres; late firm of Loyal-Francœur, Marius Nogale, of Auch, successor.'" The police will never think of coming to disturb me; unless—Ha, ha, ha!"

He had a fit of laughing which lasted a full minute.

"Unless it were to ask me to help them in the matter of information which my predecessor's clients might furnish! Ha, ha, ha! that would be too funny! Well, and why not? It would be my passport. I should have in that a certain assurance of impunity and tranquillity all my life. I've already put them on one false scent; they'd find they'd have plenty more of the same."

He reflected for a moment, then:

"After all," he continued, "I shall never do what the political police do every day of their lives. When one thinks that the Government maintains, in societies, clubs, and papers, highly paid detectives who are charged with informing it of everything that's said and done! Whatever can the poor wretches put in their reports? If they've nothing to say, they get sworn at; so they invent! And that's how the ratepayers' money is squandered. Our money, for, after all, I'm a ratepayer. What waste! what ruin! Ah, if I was only prefect of police, or a minister!

In his excitement M. Marius Nogale had feverishly brandished his umbrella. The end of it grazed the ample bosom of a fat lady who, coming from the direction of the Rue Lepic, had just entered the boulevard.

"Take care, clumsy!" exclaimed the woman in a furious voice.

M. Loyal started in surprise. He knew that voice. The fat lady whom he had touched with his umbrella was none other than Madame Honoré Broussel, who was just returning from a fresh visit to the Cité Maupy. If ever there was an opportunity for testing his disguise, this was it. Approaching the majestic midwife, he muttered a few words of excuse. But his humble air had no other result than that of making Madame Broussel more arrogant still.

"If you don't know how to hold an umbrella, you shouldn't carry one," said she drily. "There, look out! you're going to tread on my dog's paw, you ugly nigger!"

M. Loyal-Franceur was delighted. Madame Broussel herself did not recognise him.

"Ducky," he murmured in his most caressing voice, approaching her ear. But she gave a shriek like that of a startled guinea-fowl.

"Insolent fellow! Go away, wretch, or I'll call a policeman—that is to say, if I can find one. Good gracious! what does a woman expose herself to when she goes out alone in Paris!"

"Ducky, it's me, I tell you; don't you know my voice?"

"Ah! Good gracious!" cried Madame Broussel, pale with real agitation this time, "you, why, so it is. But how, by what lucky chance—?"

"Be quiet, we'll meet again later on. There's a crowd collecting."

This was true. The quarrel between the "nigger" and the "fat women," to which was added the barking of Marquis, had attracted the attention of two or three street urchins. One of them, a pastry-cook's boy who was carrying on his head a hot pie and ought probably to have been in a great hurry, had already approached to take a part in the dispute. Several loiterers stopped. Too many people would have been dangerous for Loyal-Franceur.

"Walk on," he whispered in Madame Broussel's ear, "I'll catch you up." Then, bowing respectfully to her, he walked up the Rue Lepic, to the great vexation of the spectators, followed the Rue Véron, the Rue Germain-Pillon, and arrived at the Place Pigalle, where he awaited his anxious "ducky." She arrived and would have thrown herself in his arms but he prevented her.

"Don't gush," he said quickly, "give me your arm and come along. It won't do for me to be recognised."

"Ah! my dear, what a surprise! I was frantic at having had no news from you since that fatal day; I've so much to tell you."

"And I too. But is your house safe? Can I go there without being arrested?"

"I think so; besides you're so well disguised."

"Then you wouldn't have recognised me?"

"Why, even now that I know all about it, I'm wondering whether it's you. If it hadn't been for your voice—"

"Well, tell me this, have the police bothered you?"

"A little, not much; they made a search, but they found nothing. As to the examination—"

"What did they ask you?"

"About everything, about the child, about you, the girl—Ah!" she cried



striking her forehead. "Talking about the girl, where do you think I've just come from?"

"However should I know?"

"Ah, my dear, what a splendid chance? Listen; when you went away, you had some affair in hand that a girl was mixed up in, hadn't you?"

"Yes," said M. Loyal-Francœur, with a touch of bitterness, "a young girl that I had 'put away,' and who escaped, robbing me of the fruits of a splendid combination."

"Well, I believe I know where she is."

"Impossible!"

In spite of himself, Loyal-Francœur had uttered this exclamation in a very loud voice, so loud that several people turned round. He noticed this and said in a more moderate tone of voice:

"Tell me all about it, quick!"

The midwife told him how, on the same day that the "catastrophe" in the Rue des Chantres happened, she was at the Cité Maupy, where she had been summoned by her cousin the *ex-vivandière*; how she had found the young girl suffering from meningitis who had been picked up in the middle of the night on the Boulevard Clichy or Rochechouart.

"On what day? Did they say on what day?" cried the inquiry agent anxiously.

"Why, just before you went—two, three, four days, I think."

"It's she. The devil has given her into my hands again! Come, there are good days in store for clever people, and I won't throw up the game. But the girl is ill you say?"

"I should think so!—meningitis. At her age it is fatal in nineteen cases out of twenty."

"And is she well attended to?"

"Oh, these rag-pickers are good folks; they do what they can. But the business is a fearful one and the air poisonous, both of which things are not favourable for anyone's recovery."

"*Saperlotte!* you frighten me. She mustn't die. It's most important she shouldn't."

"But—"

"No buts. We must get her out of it; have the best doctors to her and neglect nothing, nothing, nothing. She must, I tell you, she must get well."

"Goodness me, who is the girl? If you were her father you couldn't do more."

"Her father! better than that. She represents to me sum of two hundred thousand francs."

Madame Honoré Broussel was silent. Such genius overpowered her.

"Come, no beating about the bush," continued Loyal-Francœur, "I must see this girl and take the necessary steps to safeguard my interests."

"But how will you arrange it?"

"That's my look out. Only do as I tell you, and all will go well."

"But you're not afraid of risking yourself?"

"Yes. But I shall take my precautions."

## XLIII.

## M. MARIUS TAKES UP HIS QUARTERS.

IF he had only consulted his own wishes M. Loyal-Francœur would have gone on the spot to visit the patient. But unfortunately everything has its drawbacks, and if the southern skin which he had factitiously adopted was useful for purposes of disguise, it was, for the purpose of his new plans, too easily recognisable, and, consequently, dangerous. He wanted to go and visit Jeanne at the Cité Maupy, in order to take measures to get possession of her again. Now, to go there in his present condition would be to cause himself to be noticed by all the inhabitants of the Cité, and, in the case of fresh trouble with the police, to risk having a hundred witnesses to give evidence against him. But he could not get rid of the confounded yellow stain in a few hours. Alcindor had not deceived him as to the quality, and the colour was all the deeper, for this reason, that, intending to go out, M. Loyal-Francœur had applied some fresh to the places where it was beginning to fade. If Marius Nogale's skin protected M. Loyal-Francœur, in return it put a veto on any fresh disguise. He would have to wait, then, until the dye had faded off.

"Well, look here," said M. Loyal-Francœur, "is there danger in her stopping there? What is her present condition?"

"Complete torpor. The comatose state which constitutes the first stage of the disease. She knows no one and does not move."

"And that may last?"

"About a fortnight altogether, that is to say, seven or eight days from to-day."

"And after that?"

"Oh, I can't answer for afterwards. That's a matter for the doctor, or rather for chance. She may die, she may live, she may remain an idiot."

"That would be the best for me. But, at present, she can't be moved without danger?"

"Oh, impossible! No doctor would allow it."

"Splendid; then there's no fear of them taking her away from me. Now, two things are still necessary."

"What are they?"

"That she should not speak."

"Oh, you can set your mind at rest. I've often seen cases like this in the hospital. When the patient begins to come to himself he's not able to understand what's going on, and if he does understand a little he can't express his thoughts. For the next fortnight, at least—looking at her present state—I can answer for her silence."

"Good. The next thing is, that the family must not be informed."

"No fear. I've undertaken that part of the business. I shall begin by telling them that I have a clue, that I know the parents, but that I must be careful how I tell them of their daughter's condition."

"Only speak of one parent, and don't speak for a few days."

"A few days. And the parent, who is it?"

"Why, me, of course. Unfortunately, I can't play the part just at present, and, more than that, when once I've begun, I can't keep it up long."

"Why not?"

"I'm just about to start a business on my present appearance. I must

be constantly seen. Do you know a good place where, at the proper moment, I can 'make up' a fresh face."

"Of course, at my house."

"Thanks, and be nabbed. The house must be surrounded by detectives."

"Not at all. I haven't seen one."

"Do you think they walk about with placards on their backs? No, for the present at least, I'll dispense with putting in an appearance in the Rue Taille-Pain."

"Then I don't see—"

"Wait a moment. In order to look after the girl, you'll have to go often to the Cité Maupy, won't you?"

"Every day, if you like."

"Every other day, that'll be enough. We must not overdo anything. Well, every other day, at four o'clock, I'll meet you here, in the Place Pigalle, and we'll go off together, talking."

"And if I had something important to tell you?"

"Write to M. Marius Nogale, the Sailors' Hotel, Rue des Batignolles. That's my new name, a name that I shall certainly stick to."

"Marius Nogale," said the midwife, trying to fix the name in her mind—"Marius Nogale, Rue des Batignolles."

"Here, here's one of my cards, anyway."

He held out a magnificent new card, a card, done "while you wait," at one franc and a-half, a masterpiece of a neighbouring printer. Madame Broussel clasped it tenderly to her breast.

"Now, the day after to-morrow, and let's each go our own way."

"Pet!"

"What now?"

"Won't you kiss me before leaving me?"

"The devil! We've got something else to do than waste our time in foolery. Well, quick, when no one's looking."

He pressed his lips lightly on the midwife's blotchy cheeks and returned quickly to his room to reflect. He thought he must be dreaming. What a stroke of luck! To suddenly find by chance the girl who had escaped from him and who, indirectly, by irritating him, had urged him to commit so many follies. For, if it had not been for this escape, he would not have lost his temper with Madame Wilson and would not, through a series of unlucky circumstances, have gone the length of killing the goose with the golden eggs and have been obliged to hide himself to avoid the unpleasant attentions of the police.

"The real author of all my woes," he said to himself, "is this girl; it's the least she can do to help to indemnify me."

It was necessary to find some plan, and this was the one he decided on. To buy or establish an office in the suburbs as soon as possible; a registry, copying, consulting office, it mattered little which; to establish himself, at any rate, so as to inspire confidence. Then to make himself up there as an old gentleman; to pass himself off as the girl's father; to go and see her two or three times; to carry her off, and inform the father, so as to obtain from him a handsome sum in exchange for his long-lost daughter. It was a return to his first project, with a little more risk, it is true. But a man must do what he can, and, above all, adapt himself to circumstances.

M. Loyal carefully perused the *Petites Affiches*. Near Batignolles, at the bottom of the Avenue de Clichy, was a small registry office to let. He went thither; the shop was kept by an old fellow, who, thinking there was

some business attached to it, had given three hundred and fifty francs for it six months before. He asked two hundred francs, and would have been pleased to take one hundred and fifty. M. Loyal looked at the place. There was a tiny office, at the back of which was another room. Then a kitchen opening into a large garden. There was no window looking on the garden, and, consequently, no prying eyes could peer into the kitchen. It was exactly what he wanted. Fortune was certainly smiling on him now, in return for his ill luck in the past. The kitchen was a *buen-retiro*, expressly made to lodge his prisoner in. He settled the affair on the spot, gave the delighted old man two hundred francs, and had the agreement drawn up by a solicitor in the Rue Nollet. This done, he moved in, bought two beds at one broker's, a desk and set of drawers at another, and had a magnificent placard painted as follows :

### REGISTRY OFFICE.

For Clerks, Servants, and Workmen of every kind.

—  
Pawntickets bought

Stocks and Shares sold

M. Marius (of Auch), Manager,

And, taking his post behind a wicket in front of which no one ever appeared he awaited events.

It may be mentioned that, in spite of this arrangement, M. Marius Nogale had not deserted the Sailors' Hotel, where he continued to sleep and take his meals. As had been agreed, Madame Broussel kept him informed as to Jeanne's condition, and, to his great satisfaction, it continued to improve. Having begun with a severe brain fever, the disease which had attacked her yielded more readily than ordinary meningitis.

M. Loyal-Francœur, gradually altering his places of meeting, had begun little by little to venture into the neighbourhood of the Hôtel-de-Ville. He had even visited Madame Broussel two or three times, being careful to ask the doorkeeper for "Madame Honoré, somnambulist," and, each time, he had noticed with pleasure that, deceived by his tawny complexion and his accent, the doorkeeper gave him, as a foreigner, the most minute directions. He would have been able to go and call on the Comte de Pringy, or the chief of police himself, without fear of detection. He was returning, then, from taking Madame Broussel home, and was making his way, with joy in his heart, to his office in the Avenue Clichy, when, at the Place de la Bourse, he found himself face to face with his former clerk, Isidore. He noticed that the latter looked at him in a curious way. Cleverer, in fact, than any of the others, the hump-back had recognised him. Loyal-Francœur had no doubt on the subject when he saw Isidore turn round and follow him. The danger was imminent. The slightest altercation might attract a crowd, or engage the attention of the police, when he would have been immediately arrested. If he allowed himself to be followed, whither should he lead Isidore? To his hotel, to his office? It would have been surrendering at discretion. If the incident had happened a little sooner, M. Loyal would not have been so embarrassed. He could have entered a station, and jumped into the first train, getting out afterwards in such a way as to

rid himself of his persecutor. But he had Jeanne to look after just at present. A happy thought struck him. Between the Rue Vivienne and the Passage des Panoramas, he knew of some houses with two exits. He hurried along. The hump-back himself has told Victor how this trick succeeded.

#### XLIV.

##### M. LOYAL-FRANCŒUR'S REMORSE.

THAT night M. Loyal-Francœur slept badly, or, to be more exact, he did not sleep at all. This man who had passed his existence in taking advantage of his fellow-creatures, with whom roguery, theft, forgery, and crime were natural incidents; this man of prey, whose peaceful nights the shedding of blood did not disturb, this man was, for the second time, haunted by sleeplessness. The first occasion had been the evening when, on his return from the little house at Nogent, after having discovered Jeanne's flight, he had found the door of Dolores' house shut. This deceit and his own consequent rage had fevered his blood; but he had consoled himself by dreaming of revenge, by swearing to find the Spanish woman again; by reflecting that he could afterwards make her pay a hundred times more dearly for her deceit of the moment. Now he had no remedy; he was frightened. Frightened! And, in spite of his mind, fertile in expedients, he could find no remedy for the situation. He could no longer say, as he had said the day before, that luck was smiling on him; the contrast was terrible.

"I did wrong," he said to himself, turning over and over in his bed. "I did wrong. That little Isidore is avaricious and greedy; I ought to have acted firmly with him, and, by means of a few louis, I should have been rid of him. True, he might have returned to the charge, but—then—then—I should have found a way of shutting his mouth." He reflected for a moment. "It would have been a good plan," he continued, "to let him follow me, entice him into some deserted alley, and twist his neck like a fowl. But there, I'm certainly getting old; I've got no pluck, I ought to retire from business. Retire! Can I do it? I'm discovered now; the wretched fellow recognised me under this disguise which I thought was so safe. And I, who was talking about going back to the Rue des Chantres, of setting up business again, of—There! it's enough to drive me off my head. My head; yes, it's my head that I should lose if I was captured now, and in a very unpleasant way. Ugh! I who talked of M. Deibler to poor Dolores, and now I'm talking about him in reference to myself."

M. Loyal-Francœur stopped suddenly. He had heard a knock at the hotel door. A sound of voices reached him. Hardly knowing what he did, he snatched up his clothes; in the twinkling of an eye he was dressed and standing in front of the door, a revolver in one hand and a knife in the other, prepared to sell his life dearly. A heavy step ascended the stairs. Then he heard the conversation of people coming up. It was simply a guest who had arrived and whose luggage the waiter was bringing up. M. Loyal-Francœur gave a sigh of relief. He turned round. The looking-glass over the chimney-piece reflected his frightened face.

"Fool that I am!" he said, "if anyone had seen me through the window, it would have been quite sufficient to arouse suspicion. And my candle not out. Another thing which might make anyone wonder."

He blew out the light hurriedly and threw himself dressed on the bed. Then the darkness was lit up; he saw an immense crowd of men assembled in front of a low-walled and gloomy-looking tomb. The first row of men was composed of soldiers, police, and detectives. In the midst of the circle was an instrument like a large sewing machine, surmounted by two beams. By the side of this machine stood a man of medium height, with an iron-grey beard. He recognised this man, as he recognised the instrument, as he recognised the spot.

"The guillotine!" he groaned in agony.

He sprung up again and lit the candle. He preferred this light which might be noticed, to the darkness which caused such terrible visions. Day-break found him worn out with fatigue, and powerless to collect his thoughts or hit on any plan. He went downstairs, timid and trembling. The landlady at her counter appeared to him like a judge on the bench.

"Have you been ill, M. Nogale?" she asked, with a gracious smile. "We heard you moving about all night, and your candle was alight."

The remark was simply meant as a kindly attention on the part of the good woman. It sounded in his ears like the last trump. He turned his face away, for he felt himself turn pale under his paint. He dared not speak, he was afraid of betraying himself. However, he made an effort, for some sort of answer was necessary.

"Yes, yes," he stammered, "I received a letter from home yesterday evening, bringing bad news of—of—my parents."

"Are they ill?"

"Yes," he replied quickly, like a drowning man catching at a straw.

"Yes, my mother is ill, very ill."

"Ah, I can understand that upsetting you; it shows you have a good heart."

"And I shall, perhaps, be obliged to go this evening or to-morrow—it will depend on the telegram that I shall get—I'm just going to the telegraph office."

"Poor man! Go quick, and let's hope the news will be good."

Loyal went out. But, once in the street, his terrors took possession of him again. If the humpback, in spite of his precautions, had followed him, if he was watching him round the corner, if he should find himself face to face with him. But there was no one in the street, and by degrees the fresh air and the cold helped to compose him. His ideas became clearer and more precise; he tried to think out some fresh plan. According to his first idea the office in the Avenue de Clichy was to serve to conceal Mademoiselle de Rieumes, whom he intended to make not only a hostage as against the ransom but a guarantee against the attentions of the police. An orderly citizen again, living quietly in his office, having manufactured for himself, from the point of view of the police, a new virginity, he would have waited calmly till the time came for negotiating the affair, and afterwards retiring far from Paris and living on his hardly-earned income. He could not think of this now. Paris was dangerous for him. Isidore might see him at his wicket; his 'new skin' was worn out. He must act, then, act at once, without losing a minute, and consider the consequences later. Shaking off his terrors, Loyal-Franceœur entered a tailor's shop in the Avenue de Clichy and bought a suit of black clothes. He had them made up into a parcel and returned to the Sailors' Hotel.

"Well?" asked the landlady.

"Well, my dear lady, I must go. My poor mother is dying."

"You have had a telegram?"

"Yes, there was one waiting at the office for me."

"It's very annoying."

"Yes, just when I'm beginning to settle down. Well, it can't be helped. I shall go by this evening's express. I'm profiting by the opportunity to take a suit of clothes to my old father."

"That's very good of you."

"Oh, it'll please him, poor old fellow. By-the-bye, you'll keep my room for me, won't you?"

"Of course, with pleasure. When shall you come back?"

"I don't know. Shall I pay my bill?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," protested the good woman.

"Yes, yes. There's no knowing what may happen. I like to be in order."

M. Marius Nogale paid his bill, went up to pack his valise and sent for a cab.

"I sha'n't come in again before I go," he said. "I have a lot of things to do. You know, when anyone is obliged to go away in a hurry—"

Once in the cab, M. Loyal was at his ease. He gave the driver the address of his office in the Avenue de Clichy. He got out there, paid his fare, and went and shut himself in his back room. At the end of an hour he came out again, completely metamorphosed. By dint of washing, the yellow tinge had disappeared. M. Loyal's skin was now pink, a trifle pale, and marked with the red and blue veins such as old men have. His hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes were white; a heavy white moustache, long, and spreading over his cheeks, adorned his upper lip, and was matched by an imperial of the same colour. As for his body, he had a slight stoop, but, thanks to some clever padding, he had gained in thickness what he had lost in height. A large red rosette adorned the button-hole of his frock-coat. At a short distance anyone would have sworn it was Colonel de Rieumes. He carried in his hand the celebrated bag, and walking a little way down the avenue he espied an empty cab which he hailed and drove to Madame Broussel's. The midwife was expecting him; on hearing his well-known ring, she came and opened the door; but she started back in wonder at the sight of this individual, whom she took for a stranger.

"Come, come, ducky," said M. Loyal, with his own smile; "I see my disguise has succeeded again. You were expecting a yellow man, and I've turned up white."

"It's marvellous! What a talent you have for it!" cried Madame Broussel, with admiration.

"You think so? Well, some one saw through my other make-up which surprised you so much. I was followed yesterday."

"No! who by?"

"By Zidore."

"Ah! the little scoundrel!" cried Madame Broussel. "I always told you, pet, that you were harbouring a serpent in your bosom. Humpties are always full of vice, you know."

"Well, I was nearly collared. So I've made up my mind to push things on and make an end of the affair to-day. You're not expecting any one?"

"Only you."

"Then I can remain here safely?"

"Certainly. If any one rings, don't open the door. And, besides, there are the boarders' rooms, at a pinch."

"Yes, I could hide there and, if the police came, get into bed and pass myself off as a girl who had been seduced."

"Get along with you!" said Madame Broussel, bursting with laughter.

"What a man it is! joking at a time like this!"

"What then? That's better than crying. Well, to return to business. You are dressed, put on your hat and go and get a cab."

"For you?"

"No, silly—for yourself. Tell the man to drive you to La Villette-circus. Then go up the Rue Secrétan. When you get to the middle, ask for Monsieur Boudillon, the Herculean Charlatan Physician—"

"Monsieur Boudillon. Well?"

"Tell him that you come from me, and that I want his trap—not the 'in-and-out,' the other one, the cab."

"All right. At what time?"

"At six exactly, here, at your house."

"Right, I'll go. Wait breakfast for me; if you want anything, you know where the keys are."

"Yes, go along, go along."

Madame Honoré Broussel hurried away. Once alone, M. Loyal-Francœur stretched himself on the sofa and began to think. And as he was very tired from his restless night, and feeling rather more comfortable about the chances of an arrest, he soon went off to sleep, the calm sleep of the just.

#### XLV.

##### A BOLD STROKE.

AT six o'clock precisely Alcindor Boudillon, dressed as a coachman, pulled up, cracking his whip, in front of Madame Honoré Broussel's house. The two lovers were finishing dinner. M. Loyal-Francœur took a glance at his disguise in the glass, in order to make sure that nothing was wrong, took up his celebrated bag and prepared to go downstairs as soon as Madame Honoré Broussel had put on her hat with its gaudy flowers.

"Take a few toilet necessities," said M. Loyal; "a little parcel; it's probable we sha'n't come back here to-night."

"Shall I take Marquis, then?"

"It's not worth while, he would be in the way, and might make it awkward for us. Come, hurry up, let's be off!"

They went downstairs. After the indispensable glance up and down the street, M. Loyal-Francœur approached Boudillon, who was sitting bolt upright on the box, and gave him a few instructions in a whisper. Then he rejoined Madame Broussel, who had already taken her seat in the cab, and they drove off. Alcindor's horse was a good one, and they soon arrived at the Cité Maupy. The grand camp of the rag-pickers is more picturesque after nightfall than by day-light. The night is for these great purifiers of the pavements of Paris their real time for work, and it is a curious sight to see them start off, lantern in hand, forming in this way arabesques of little lights, looking from a distance like will-o'-the-wisps, rising, falling, intermingling in their fanciful course in the midst of the perfect darkness of the caravansery. The cab entered the Cité and, following Madame Broussel's instructions, drew up at Prosper Martin's house. The midwife knocked at the door, which opened. Prosper and "Mother



Comfort" were there with Jeanne. As Madame Broussel had said, Mademoiselle de Rieumes was almost convalescent, physically at least; for the still enfeebled brain had not yet recovered all its clearness. At times the young girl was quite composed; she could talk almost rationally. But, as soon as any one tried to question her, at the slightest allusion to the adventure which had caused her illness, her brain became confused and fearful hallucinations attacked her. Then followed a long stupor, from which she took some time to recover. Accordingly the doctor had expressly forbidden them to put any question whatever to her, until it was certain that her mind would not be affected by it. Jeanne had just gone to bed, for, in consequence of the fine weather, she had been able to get up and take a few steps out of doors, supported on one side by the good Prosper, and on the other by the *ex-vivandière*. She was in a state of semi-slumber when Madame Broussel entered.

"Well, my friends," said the midwife in a joyous voice, "I have succeeded. I have brought the little one's father, who has come to fetch her."

"Her father!" cried Prosper—"Where is he?"

"There, in the cab. The good man—an old colonel—is rather ill. His daughter's little freak—for it was a freak—settled him. He has no use in his legs now. So, although he's dying to embrace his child, he can't move an inch. There he is, look, look how he's reaching out of the window!"

Loyal-Francœur, in fact, was struggling and thrusting his body out of the cab, showing in the dusk his grey moustache and his rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour.

"*Crebleu!* he's the right sort. And we not to go and shake him by the hand! that would be coming it rather too strong!" cried the *ex-vivandière*. She rushed to the cab and seized the pretended colonel's hand.

"Excuse me, comrade!" she said, in a comically emphatic voice. "But, without knowing one another, we must have been pretty close together on more than one battlefield. I was in the Crimea, colonel, in the brave Sixth of the Line; I was carrying my barrel at the side of poor Colonel de Camas, when he was killed, trying to recover our colours, that the Russians had captured, and his successor, Colonel Granchette—who started as a journeyman shoemaker, and died with epaulettes—promised me a medal. If ever you've heard talk of Victoire Roussel, that's me, as large as life."

"Colonel Granchette," said Loyal-Francœur, in a voice which he tried to render affected. "Yes, I knew him—a brave man. We've often fought side by side, I in the Chasseurs, he at the head of his regiment. My good woman, let us embrace one another; old comrades can't do less."

"Ah! colonel!" cried "Mother Comfort," bursting into tears.

"I embrace you with the more pleasure," continued the false colonel, "that I have just heard from your good cousin with what devotion and self-denial you have tended my poor daughter."

"We only did our duty, colonel, and your words are reward enough for us. So I shall ask the favour of a shake of your hand for this good fellow, an old soldier too—advance conscript!—who was the first to help your young lady, by picking her up out of the road where she had fallen, and bringing her here."

"Your hand, friend, your hand!" cried Loyal-Francœur, keeping up the comedy. "What a nuisance! this confounded gout keeps me sticking here, like a poor pensioner, and prevents me from going to embrace my dear child! What folly! to run away, because I thwarted her wishes!

She shall marry whom she likes. Bring her to me, my friends, I can hardly see her from here."

"One moment, colonel," replied the *ex-rivandière*. "The doctor has forbidden any excitement. We must go and prepare her for it gently."

"Do so, my friends, do so, that I may see my darling child again."

"Mother Comfort" was already at Jeanne's side. With a thousand tender precautions she spoke to her of her father who loved her, who bemoaned her, who forgave her fault, who was there, trembling, and not daring to speak to her. Jeanne looked at her with haggard eyes. At last she appeared to understand, raised her head, looked in the direction of the door and, seeing Loyal-Francœur's ruddled face in the distance, uttered a shriek and fell down in a swoon.

"Ah! good Lord! she's dead!" cried the inquiry-agent.

"No, the excitement was too much for her, that's all. It won't be anything serious," said the rag-picker, slapping Jeanne's hands.

"Suppose we took advantage of this swoon, to carry her into the cab?" said Madame Broussel, who wanted the business concluded.

"You speak sense, cousin. Once in the cab, her father will be able to console her."

"My daughter, my darling daughter!" blubbered Loyal-Francœur, shuffling about in the cab. With endless precautions Jeanne was lifted up and placed on the cushions of the cab. The false colonel took her in his arms and covered her with kisses, whilst Madame Broussel, getting carefully in, sat down so as to support her on the other side. They were about to start when, seeming suddenly to start from a dream, Loyal-Francœur addressed the *ex-rivandière*. "Ah, madame," said he, "I have forgotten; forgive me. What you have done for my daughter cannot be repaid with gold; but you have had expenses, you have stinted yourself for her; let me offer you—"

"Colonel!" protested the rag-picker, with dignity.

"No, old comrade, do not look at it thus. I am not paying you for your devotion and friendship. I only want to refund what you have spent. Here are ten louis. I have no more with me. But if any one of you is in difficulty, in want of money, in trouble with the police, let him come and knock at my house, in the Rue Bellechasse; he will always find a hand ready to clasp his, a man willing to give him help and protection."

"Oh, if it's like that, we accept," said "Mother Comfort," seizing Loyal-Francœur by the hand whilst Martin bowed in a sad and embarrassed manner.

"And now, we must be off," said the midwife. "Driver, Rue de Bellechasse."

Alcindor, who had received his instructions in advance, cracked his whip and the cab drove off. They rounded the hill, arrived at the Rue Lepic, and came out on the Boulevard de Clichy; but there, instead of going down into Paris, the cab turned to the left and followed the boulevard, in the direction of La Villette. They passed along the Rue Secrétan, turned up the little lane and pulled up at the side of the mountebank's "in-and-out." The reader knows the kind of contrivance which in the language of those wanderers is called an in-and-out. It is one of those large vehicles which serve ordinarily as the proprietor's dwelling, but in which, at fair-times, the show is held. As there is only one phenomenon for the public to see the performance has no fixed time for beginning and ending; people are constantly going in and out, and hence the name "in-

and-out," given to the exhibition and, from that, to the vehicles of the charlatans, somnambulists, exhibitors of savages, calves with two heads, cats with trunks, etc. Alcindor got down first, took one of the lamps from the cab and entered his waggon. In a trice he shook up his bed, and, hanging the lamp on a wall, went out again. Loyal-Francœur and he lifted Jeanne, who was still unconscious, and carried her into the waggon. They placed her on the bed which the mountebank had just arranged. The midwife felt her pulse and examined her.

"There's nothing wrong," she said. "When she comes round, she will be just as she was before. Now, what are we going to do?"

"We? We must manage, all three of us, to make shift here as well as we can for to-night."

"What! we're not going back to any place?"

"And get arrested? No fear. During a campaign one mustn't be too particular about the accommodation. One must suit one's self to the times."

"But my dog, Marquis—?"

"Well, there's something for him to eat; he can wait, we'll see later on."

Madame Honoré Broussel did not dare reply, but she was very sad. This woman who had just borne a hand in the odious comedy by which a girl was torn from her friends, who did not trouble herself about the danger which this girl who was hardly convalescent might run in this dark, dirty, and close waggon, this woman had tears in her eyes at the idea that her dog would be unhappy!

"Now, let's have some rest," said Loyal-Francœur. "We've got a tough job before us to-morrow."

## XLVI.

### ON THE SCENT.

At the exact hour that M. Loyal-Francœur left Jeanne in Alcindor Boudillon's "in-and-out," Victor and Isidore were leaving Colonel de Rieumes' house. The former had had a great weight taken off his mind, the latter was gayer than ever.

"Now we've started," said he to his companion, "things will go ahead, and I hope we sha'n't be long before we nab our late master; we're going to the Préfecture, I suppose?"

Victor was full of care. Colonel de Rieumes' grief had deeply affected him. He was tortured by remorse, and this idea tormented his brain more and more: that, until he had restored Jeanne to her father, misfortune would prey upon his mother and sister. Silently he followed the hump-back, who continued his chatter.

"I've never been to the Préfecture; have you? I suppose not. It must be very curious."

"Very curious," said Victor, like an echo.

"Mustn't it? I should like to be a detective. When I've told my story to the chief of police I shall propose to help the detective in his search; I'll bet I find the gov'nor before he does."

"It's possible," said Victor abstractedly.

They arrived at the Préfecture, and found that they must ask their way to the police office. A detective took them there. The chief of police had

just come in worn with fatigue ; he had been on his legs all day, looking into a case of robbery at the Bank. Nevertheless he had the two visitors in and listened attentively to them.

"Then you believe," he said, when Isidore had concluded, "you believe that Loyal-Francœur is still in Paris?"

"I saw him the day before yesterday."

"Are you certain that you were not mistaken?"

"Quite certain."

"Then he must have pretended to go to Belgium in order to throw us on a false scent. That explains why letters addressed to Brussels have not been called for ; clever, very clever. And what did he look like?"

"He was very dark and had black, curly hair ; but what he couldn't alter was his eyes ; I should know those eyes anywhere."

"You are right. That's his vulnerable point. You would have made a good detective," said the magistrate, smiling.

Isidore gave Victor a triumphant glance.

"But, now," resumed the chief of police. "What do you expect? Chance caused you to meet him. Who knows whether that chance will ever be renewed? Paris is a big place."

"In any opinion, sir, the old woman ought to be watched, his mistress, the Rue Taille-Pain midwife ; she must know where he's hiding."

"Ah ! the midwife is his mistress !" cried the chief of police. "That's a thing that should have been known before and which explains much. She can't screen herself behind professional etiquette now, so far as concerns the supposititious birth. I have a hold on her, since, according to your statements, I can proceed against her as an accomplice of abduction."

"Not to mention that in all probability the young lady is concealed at her house."

"As to that, no ; I'm certain of that. We searched her house the first day, and I've had her watched for a week. Nothing suspicious occurred."

"It's a funny thing, I can't get it out of my head that we should learn something through her."

"It's a happy inspiration, perhaps. I'll have her watched again from to-morrow."

"And I shall begin to-night," said the hump-back. "The old witch was down on to me enough, when she knew that I couldn't answer her, for me to want my revenge ; I'm off there now. Are you coming, M. Victor?"

"Excuse me," said the latter, "I must first ask the chief of police what steps he intends to take with regard to me. Am I not compromised in the matter?" he added.

"Yes," replied the chief of police, "and in spite of my appreciation of the spontaneous action that you have taken, in spite of my wish to give you the full benefit of it, my duty forces me to detain you here until I have consulted the magistrate, who alone can decide what shall be done."

"Then I remain here at your disposal, sir," said Victor, hanging his head.

"Oh, I don't want to send you to the Dépôt. You will remain here, in the detectives' quarters. To-morrow morning, early, I'll take you to the magistrate. You, sir," he added, turning to Isidore, "you can go."

The hump-back shook his friend's hand sadly and left the room, rather vexed at having, after a manner, enticed him into a trap, but hoping that the next day would see things put right. As for Victor, he was placed, as the chief of police had ordered, in the detectives' room, where a mattress was placed on the floor for him. He threw himself on it fully dressed

and—unlooked-for phenomenon—fell sound asleep. A light tap on the shoulder woke him. It was broad daylight. The chief of police was standing by him. He got up at once.

"I have had the magistrate informed," said the chief of police, "but he can't see you until twelve o'clock. In the meanwhile, if you want anything, if you wish your friends to know—"

"Thanks, sir, but I should prefer them not to know anything at present. When my fate has been decided I shall beg you to have my poor old mother informed, with the necessary precautions."

"I hope there will be no need for that, and that, in accordance with my advice, the magistrate will be satisfied with your promise to reappear when called on. For the present you must wait."

The chief of police was about to retire, when a great noise was heard in the entrance corridor. It was the hump-back, who had returned all agog.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked the chief. "Have you found Loyal-Franceur?"

"No; but there's something in the wind. The midwife was out all day yesterday; at seven o'clock last night she went off in a cab with a man who seemed anxious to conceal himself, and she stopped out all night."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chief of police, "then we've been outdone again, unless, indeed, it's quite a natural thing—a man coming to fetch a midwife to a woman. No matter, the point is worth clearing up, and we'll do it. Come along, gentlemen; let us go to the Rue Taille-Pain."

"I as well?" asked Victor.

"You as well. I shan't take any detectives with me. I'm going to try an experiment which must remain a secret, if it comes to nothing. You will accompany me and give me your assistance if necessary."

"Certainly," said the hump-back, with a confident air.

"But—my peculiar position—" said Victor.

"Oh, you can come back here with me, and the magistrate shall give his decision. You don't intend to escape, do you? Let us suppose you have made no confession. But, by all means, do not let us lose any time before acting."

They arrived at the Rue Taille-Pain and approached the midwife's house. Her door, as well as that on the floor above, where was the somnambulist's room, was locked. They knocked. At the noise which they made, the dog, who was doubtless asleep, began to bark and to scratch at the door angrily.

"There's no one there," said the chief of police.

They went and questioned the doorkeeper. Madame Honoré Broussel had, in fact, gone away in a cab the night before, with a man who had arrived during the morning, and who had passed the day shut up in the house, whilst she was scouring Paris.

"Ah, you can't tell us where she went, I suppose?" said the chief of police.

"What right have you to ask me, sir?"

The chief of police drew the end of his sash from his pocket.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, but I didn't know you. Alas, no, I can't tell you where she went. But she can't have gone far, for she has left her dog here, and he's been howling all night."

"Suppose we waited for her?" said the hump-back. "They'll be coming back, perhaps."

"Impossible," replied the chief of police, "I have other important business. Remain here. I'll send one of my men to you."

"Don't you think," hazarded the hump-back, "that it would be a good thing to have a look what they've been doing in here?"

"Yes, of course. Only we must send for a locksmith to open the doors."

The hump-back began to laugh.

"If you would allow me—" he began

"Well?"

"One acquires certain talents in M. Loyal-Franceur's school."

"Well, what talents?"

"This, for instance: to open a lock with a hook. Although I was only a little clerk, knowing nothing of his affairs, he showed me one day how it was done, in case that, having no one else near, he might want help—"

"I see," said the chief of police, with perfect coolness. "Then you have had lessons in burglary, a theoretical and practical course?"

"Pretty nearly."

"Splendid. But, what is not quite so splendid is, that the science, once acquired, is liable to be employed against the teacher. Well, my dear sir, go ahead."

"You'll allow me?"

"More than that, I order you. Have you your instrument with you?"

"I brought one on the chance."

"Then get to work quickly. I shall be pleased to see how it's done."

The hump-back produced from his pocket, not the enormous bunch of huge hooks which locksmiths generally carry, but a neat black morocco case. In this case, fitting into one another, so as to occupy as little space as possible, were five little bars of steel, bent at one end and square at the other. Below was a single handle provided with a hole of the same dimensions as the bars, and, consequently, fitting any of them. Lastly, a steel crow-bar, divided into three pieces which screwed one into another.

"A very pretty little apparatus," said the chief of police, examining it, like a connoisseur. "English, eh?"

"No, sir, American. Loyal-Franceur had three of them. This is the least complete of them."

"Let's see how it works."

Isidore examined the lock, selected one of the hooks which seemed to him the right size, fitted it on the handle and introduced it into the lock. The hook was too small. He took the next one; two turns, and the door opened.

"There you are," said he, turning round with a satisfied smile.

"You're wonderfully clever," said the chief of police, who during the operation had lit a cigarette. "Let's look at the inside now."

There was nothing striking to be seen inside, unless it was the table, laid for, and bearing unmistakable signs of, a plentiful dinner for two: two piles of plates, two glasses, two coffee-cups. As the three men examined this, the dog, Marquis, prowled round them, growling and rubbing himself against the furniture. Suddenly the chief of police struck his forehead.

"What a splendid idea!" he said,—"this dog; he's old, he must be attached to his mistress?"

"I should just think so," said Isidore; "she loves him more than a child."

"If he could put us on her track?"

"Do you think it's possible?" said Victor.

"At any rate, we might see. Try it, you who know him."

The hump-back bent down, patted the dog, who began to wag his tail, and led him to the door.

"Seek her, Marquis," he said in a coaxing voice, "seek your mistress."

The dog snuffed at the ground, sneezed two or three times with satisfaction, and began to go down the steps, still holding his nose to the ground.

"Follow, follow," said the chief of police.

After having shut the broken door again as well as they could, the three men ran down the steps. Once on the street, Marquis looked about him and began to run. It was not a scent that he was following; it was a road familiar to him which he followed as fast as his short legs and fat stomach would allow him. Isidore, Victor, and the chief of police followed close on him. He followed the Rue Saint-Martin as far as the boulevard, then plunged into the faubourg, went up the Boulevard Magenta, followed the outer boulevard and quickly entered the Rue Lepic. He was going to the Cité Maupy, whither he had accompanied his mistress so many times. The three men followed him, more and more interested in this novel chase. Arrived at the Rue Mercadet, he entered the Cité Maupy and went straight to Prosper Martin's house, where he began to cry and scratch at the door.

## XLVII.

### QUID PRO QUO.

At the dog's cries the door opened and "Mother Comfort" appeared. At the sight of Marquis, accompanied by three well-dressed gentlemen, she was a little surprised.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" she asked.

"Oh," said the chief of police carelessly, "we only wanted to know whether you know this dog that we found straying and who brought us here?"

"Yes, sir; he belongs to a relation of mine. But how good of you!"

"We are anxious to find as soon as possible the dog's mistress, your relation—"

"Madame Broussel," continued Victor.

"Who was to come here this evening, I believe," added the hump-back.

The rag-picker looked at them mistrustfully. What could these three individuals want with Madame Broussel? Were their intentions good or bad?

"Tell us quickly, I entreat you," said Victor; "it is, perhaps, a matter of life and death for a young girl."

"The young lady who was here?" cried the *ex-vivandière*, suddenly roused by this remark which had been made at a venture.

"What, she was here?" began the hump-back, but his voice died away in a groan of pain; the chief of police had stamped on his toes.

"Exactly so, the young lady who was here," he said, composedly, giving poor Isidore a significant look.

"Ah, what has happened to the poor child? tell me, gentlemen, tell me quickly," cried the rag-picker, her face already pale.

"That's just what we don't know; that's what we want to find out. Madame Broussel—for it was Madame Broussel who brought her here, was it not?"

"Not a bit of it; it was only by chance she came here. But," objected "Mother Comfort," mistrustfully, "what do you come asking all these questions for? You appear to me to be telling lies in order to get at the truth, as the adjudant used to say. Come, play fair, and tell us your names, rank, and numbers."

"Very well. You look like an honest woman, so I'll be frank with you. I am a police commissary, and I am engaged, with these two gentlemen, in searching for—in her own interest, and solely to restore her to her father who is bemoaning her—a young girl, the same one, if I am not mistaken, who was concealed here."

"Then, monsieur le commissaire, in my turn, I have the satisfaction of informing you that your mission is at an end; for the father himself came here to fetch his daughter away yesterday evening."

"Yesterday evening! Why, it's impossible. At what time?"

"About half-past seven—eight o'clock, perhaps."

"Why, at that time we were with Colonel de Rieumes at his own house," cried Victor.

"The colonel! Why, my lad, it was a colonel, and a fine old fellow too, who came to fetch the young lady, and the poor old man was so upset that he couldn't get out of the cab."

"What was he like? Describe him," said the chief of police.

"Strongly built, white, almost grey, moustache; an officer's rosette in his buttonhole."

"It's incredible. He didn't tell you his name?"

"No, but he promised to come again. And—wait a minute—I believe, yes, that was it; when they went away he told his man to drive to the Rue de Bellechasse."

"Rue de Bellechasse! Why, Colonel de Rieumes' house is there. It's like a dream."

"Wait a moment. One more question. Did the young lady, when she saw her father, or the man who professed to be her father, did she recognise him?" asked the chief of police.

"Certainly she did. She sat up to look at him."

"And then?"

"Then, she was so weak, the darling, that she fell back on her bed."

"And she followed him?"

"Without any bother."

"It's incredible."

"Has Colonel de Rieumes, with his long face, been trifling with us?" hazarded the hump-back.

"I might say to you, gentlemen, have you been trifling with me? But, no, there's some fresh machination in it that we must get to the bottom of."

"Hold," said Victor; "the midwife is supposed to have brought Colonel de Rieumes. Was not this woman playing a double game, or rather, despairing of finding her accomplice again, and urged on by greed for gain, did she not determine to restore Mademoiselle de Rieumes to her father, knowing that he would reward her liberally?"

"It's just possible, although it's not my opinion," said the chief of police thoughtfully. "At any rate, there is a simple way of clearing it up; to take this woman to the Rue Bellechasse and confront her with the colonel."

"But would she go?"

"She could not refuse. However, it is easy enough to ask her. My good woman," said the chief of police, addressing the rag-picker, who,



although very much puzzled, had withdrawn a little during the conversation between the three men, "my good woman you would not refuse to go with us to the young lady's father's house?"

"Refuse! certainly not," said the honest woman. "I should be glad to see the good colonel again. But what do you want me to go there for?"

"To prove to us that you are not mistaken and that it was really the colonel whom you saw last night."

"What an idea! of course it was him. I don't suppose he'll deny it."

"Well, one of you go and fetch a cab. We will start."

"All right, and I'll just make myself look a bit decent while you're gone."

The hump-back set off as fast as his rickety legs would carry him. The chief of police sat down thoughtfully on a heap of stones. He was trying to find some solution to this fresh puzzle. There was no doubt in his mind about one thing—Colonel de Rieumes had not been to the Cité Maupy. They had to deal with some fresh plot on the part of this infernal creature who defied all pursuit and from whom the police, up to that time, had experienced nothing but defeat. Nevertheless he was anxious to sift the whole thing thoroughly in his mind.

"Loyal-Franceur has recaptured his prey," he thought. "And he has worked it in such a way that all that we, who have been especially favoured by chance, have been able to do, is to arrive twelve hours too late. There's no doubt he's no mean foe."

Isidore returned with a four-wheeler.

"Will you get in, madame?" said the chief of police.

"Certainly. But—hullo! there's someone better than me. It's Prosper Martin, 'the Bear,' himself; the man who picked the young lady up on the boulevard, and who nursed her with me, and devotedly too, I can assure you; just ask him about it. Hey! Martin! advance! these gentlemen have got something to say to you."

Prosper Martin was just returning from selling to his wholesale dealer, the "ogre," as he is called, the produce of the last night's collecting. He came up and asked what was to do. He gave the same answers to the chief of police's questions as the woman had done.

"It's too much, really," said the officer. "Well, let us go, we shall see."

"Shall I go with you?" asked Prosper.

"Certainly, my man; two witnesses are better than one. And, besides, you can be giving us some more information on the way."

They got into the cab. The chief of police, Victor, Mother Comfort, and Prosper Martin sat inside. The hump-back got up on the box. The dog, who since his arrival had been lying in a corner of the room, got up and gave vent to some piteous howls.

"Ah, one moment," said the chief of police. "We mustn't forget the dog. He has done us a good service already; he may do us more. We must not neglect anything."

The cab started. During the journey the chief of police questioned Martin. The rag-picker related to him all possible details, how he had found Jeanne, how he had taken her to his house, how it had been determined to keep her at the Cité Maupy, nursed at the expense of the whole community.

"And you did not think of informing the police?" asked the magistrate. "It did not strike you that this young lady must have friends, parents, who were searching for her and worrying themselves about her absence?"

"Yes, for Mother Comfort had told her cousin, Madame Broussel, who's in that line, to look after that, and Madame Broussel told us she'd discovered the father."

"And this father never came to visit his daughter?"

"We saw him yesterday for the first time."

"It's incredible. One might almost think that you were right," said the chief of police to Victor, "and that yesterday evening, after you had left Colonel de Rieumes' house, the midwife went and informed him. Well, we shall soon know. Here we are in the Rue de Bellechasse."

The cab stopped. The hump-back tumbled down from his seat and ran and rung for admittance. On seeing all this caravan enter the court-yard the porter thought he was dreaming. The rag-picker's working-clothes and the *ex-vivandière's* fanciful get up especially struck him with amazement. However, owing to the presence of the chief of police, he dared not make any remark. On being informed, Colonel de Rieumes came running out in a state of great excitement, thinking to have news of his daughter. As soon as she saw him Mother Comfort cried:

"Ah, that's him right enough!"

The chief of police and Victor exchanged glances.

"This good woman," said the former, "tells us, colonel, that you went yesterday evening, with one of her relations, a friend of Loyal-Francœur's, to fetch your daughter, who was being nursed at her house."

"I!" cried the colonel, amazed.

"Yes, you, colonel; didn't we have a talk together? It was you in person, as the lieutenant of the Third, who had been a lawyer's clerk, used to say."

"And I recognise this gentleman as the person who came in a cab yesterday," said Prosper Martin in his turn.

"But my daughter! What did you say about my daughter?"

"Why, we gave her to you last night, *mille bombes!*" replied the *ex-vivandière*, "I gave her you with my own hands, because, on account of your gout, you couldn't take her yourself, and stopped in the cab."

The plot thickened. A prey to a thousand different feelings, the poor colonel thought he was going mad. Suddenly Prosper Martin struck his forehead.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Wait; this isn't the gentleman who came to fetch the young lady last night. He's got the same hair, the same moustache, and the same clothes; but his eyes aren't the same; the other man had green eyes which shone in the dark; I noticed them in spite of myself."

"Loyal-Francœur!" muttered the chief of police. "I thought as much."

"And it is to that man that my daughter has been delivered again!" cried M. de Rieumes, with a groan. "What have I done, my God! to deserve so much trouble?"

All the spectators were deeply affected at the old man's agonised grief. In order to try and collect herself, the *ex-vivandière* exclaimed, as she passed a rough hand over her wet eyes:

"*Crêbleu de sacrébleu!* How could we tell that that old sham soldier, with his dandified airs, was only a common civilian and a low hound? I should know him, too, by those green eyes, and if ever the scoundrel falls into my clutches, he'll have a bad time of it, trust me!"

"Well," said the chief of police, wishing to put an end to this painful scene, "unfortunately, we know the truth now. It's a new plot of this

wretch, that's all; a new reckoning to add to his account. But we shall have a settlement together, and soon, it is to be hoped. As for you, colonel, make your mind easy; if he has carried your daughter off, it is only with the object of extorting money. You will hear from him."

"May God grant it!" said the colonel, falling senseless on a chair.

## XLVIII.

### A COMFORTER.

NOT wishing to arouse M. de Rieumes' grief again, the chief of police walked silently towards the door, making a sign to his companions to follow him. They obeyed. Prosper Martin and "Mother Comfort" were very crestfallen. Although they had nothing to reproach themselves with, for they had thought to act for the best, they were conscious within themselves of an indefinable feeling. It seemed to them that they were guilty of a grave fault, that they had assisted in the committal of a crime. Victor, for his part, was more seriously affected, for it was not in good faith and ignorance that he had made himself an accomplice in his former master's infamous proceedings. He had really his share of responsibility in the whole affair, and he was tortured by genuine remorse. As for the hump-back, he was dreaming of meeting Loyal-Francœur in the street, of flying at his throat, of having him arrested, of forcing him to restore Mademoiselle de Rieumes to her father and of winning thereby no end of honour and glory, denoted by innumerable ten-franc pieces representing myriads of drinks.

"As you are here," said the chief of police to the two rag-pickers, "will you come as far as the Préfecture of Police? I must take down your statements."

"Certainly, sir," replied Martin.

"At your orders," said the former *vivandière*.

"As for you, M. Victor, the magistrate is waiting for us."

"Yes, sir."

"And I," said the hump-back, "what am I to do?"

"You are at liberty. Come with me if you like, or go to your work. Only I must ask you to come to my office before six o'clock, to sign the depositions."

"Six o'clock. Right. I'm going to have some breakfast now; the walk has given me an appetite. But may I take the dog, sir?"

"Yes, take him. In fact, you are the only one that he knows. But don't lose him."

"No fear."

And the hump-back strutted off majestically, followed by the dog, who trotted at his heels.

At this moment, a man dressed as a mason, with his dusty cap crushed down over his eyes, and who for more than half an hour past had been busy reading the placards at the corner of the Rue Grenelle, approached the group, which he examined without appearing to be looking at anything.

"Ha, ha!" muttered, "M. Isidore, my late clerk, with the chief of police. I wasn't mistaken. And Victor as well. Well, well, I was right

when I said that the fellow would go wrong; I shall have to get rid of him. Who are the others? The rag-pickers from the Cité Maupy! How did they discover them? How lucky they arrived after the bird had flown. Ah! of course, the dog. Cursed beast! Well, I'm here luckily, and I'll provide for all."

Colonel de Rieumes had remained seated in his chair, groaning, sobbing, and in a state of complete prostration. The door of the room opened noiselessly. A woman entered with a light step, he felt a soft and velvety hand clasp his own, whilst a silvery voice whispered in his ear:

"Why should you despair? God is great and merciful. I have prayed for you and for her."

He raised his head by an effort and recognised Louise. Behind her the Comte de Pringy, his arms folded, was silently standing.

"You told me that I was like your daughter," continued Louise, in her soft voice, "or, at least, that I reminded you of her. Let me remain with you until she comes back; *she*, for she will come back, I am certain of it, I have prayed to God for you, God will hear my prayer, and then there will be two of us to love you."

"Dear child," murmured the colonel, taking the young girl's hand and drawing it towards him.

"I never knew my father," continued Louise, "but when you placed a kiss on my forehead yesterday, it seemed as if my father was clasping me in his arms. Kiss me again, father, and think of your daughter."

"Dear little girl," repeated the old man; "I do not know how it is that your presence comforts me, your words soothe my grief, your promises, in which I dare not believe, give me, nevertheless, a peaceful mind. Ah! thanks for having come."

"Listen, I must not tell a lie," said Louise, blushing. "It was not for that reason that I came. Let me tell you all."

"Speak."

"When you left our house yesterday, my mother and I were very happy, but a strange surprise was in store for us. My brother, my poor brother, when he read your name, uttered a cry, and then ran away like a madman, taking your card with him. Where was he going? We knew not. But we were frightened, and the evening, the night, passed without our hearing of him. We spent a terrible night, weeping and praying, for him and for you. At last, this morning, seeing my poor mother in despair, I came to see you and to ask you, you who have been so kind and generous, to come to our help once more, to tell us why your name upset our brother so much, and to give us your aid in finding and saving him."

"Your brother! Then you did not know?"

"I know, I see all now. But at the time we did not understand, we could not imagine what he meant by the cry that he uttered: 'He saves my sister; the man whose daughter I stole!' We were frightened, sir, and my poor mother is very old to bear the grief which the loss of her son would cause her."

"Yes, I see, poor child; I understand better than anyone, alas!" said the colonel, wiping away a tear.

"Oh, forgive me. I have aroused your grief again, without knowing it. What was I saying? I came to see you, to ask you whether you had seen Victor, what passed, what we have to hope and what to fear?"

"Well?"

"Then, as I came to your house, not knowing how to ask nor to whom to speak, I met this gentleman, who interested himself in me and brought me here, at the same time consoling me and telling me what had passed, that you had forgiven my brother. And you did well, sir, to forgive him; he is so good; if he sinned, it was from weakness, for our sakes, to give us our daily bread."

"I know it," said the colonel, "and I forgive him. He has promised me, moreover to atone for his sin, if he can. He has been spending the night in doing it, he is engaged on it now. He has just been here."

"Yes, they told me so, and I am happy. I must go, too, and set my poor mother's mind at rest. I must go, but you will let me come again, will you not?"

"Let you, my dear child; I beg, I entreat you to do so. No, better than that. Go and fetch your mother, and you can both live here, happy and peaceful. When I see you I shall seem to suffer less."

Louise got up and held her face to the old man, who kissed it again. Then she fled, hurrying to take the good news to her mother.

"Poor little thing! what a heart she has!" said the colonel to Pringy, after watching her go.

"She's an angel, a sweet angel!" cried the count impetuously.

## XLIX.

### IN WHICH THE HUMP-BACK HAS A BAD TIME OF IT.

STILL ruminating over his projects, Isidore, who already saw fortune smiling on him in the future, had left the chief of police and had gone and had a plentiful breakfast at a public-house in the Rue du Bac. After a cup of coffee, liberally diluted with cognac, an extra drain, and then another extra drain, the hump-back was in a state of complete beatitude, to which two glasses of dry champagne—or reputed as such—specially recommended by the proprietor, only served to add. As he was finishing his meal a gentleman, a very handsome man, who had been watching him for some little time, came up to him, patted the dog, and finally proposed a game of piquet. The hump-back, flattered at this attention, did not dare refuse. The handsome man called for cards and fresh drinks. Isidore, who nevertheless was not much of a player, won the first game. His partner asked for his revenge and lost again. More drinks were ordered. They began a third game. In short, the hump-back concluded by altogether forgetting the promise that he had made to go to the Préfecture. At six o'clock he was still playing and drinking. At seven he was no longer playing but was still drinking. At ten o'clock, perfectly drunk, he remembered that he had a task to perform in order to make his fortune. He rose by an effort, took leave of his new friend and went out to fulfil his mission, that is to say, to look for Loyal-Francœur. In his mind, muddled by the fumes of alcohol, he came to the conclusion that the late inquiry-agent would be prowling about the Cité Maupy. It was thither, then, that he must make his way. However, this was a difficult matter, for the hump-back saw everything going round and round and his legs seemed to him to be made of cotton wool.

Notwithstanding this he set out courageously, reeling, running up against

the foot-passengers and shops and with great difficulty keeping out of the way of the traffic. Marquis, the pug, followed him, with his tail between his legs. He advanced painfully, but he advanced; he succeeded in crossing the Pont-Royal: he traversed the Avenue de l'Opéra without accident; he ascended the Rue Blanche as far as the outer boulevard and climbed the Rue Lepic. But as he was rounding the corner of the street close to the Montmartre Cemetery, in a very lonely place, a heavy hand was laid on his neck. He tried to cry out. Everything became suddenly dark, and at the same time his voice died away in his throat: his head had been muffled in a woollen blanket, the ends of which fluttered about his lean body. In the twinkling of an eye he was enveloped entirely in it. Then he felt himself lifted up and hoisted on the shoulders of a man who began to walk rapidly away, and, in spite of the blanket which covered him, he heard a sardonic voice say with a chuckle which was well known to him,

"That's one of them. The others' turn will soon come."

The dog barked joyfully.

If he could hear another's voice through the blanket, it followed that his own could be heard; now it was only eleven o'clock, there must still be people about in the streets. By calling for help he ran a chance either of being liberated or at least of frightening his ravishers and forcing them to fly and abandon him. But, as if his intention had been foreseen, he felt the point of a dagger held to his breast and the same voice said to him:

"If you struggle or call out, you're a dead man."

The hump-back took the hint and did not move again. The man who was carrying him, and who must have been very strong, for he did not seem to notice his burden, hurried along with hasty strides. Ah! how poor Isidore regretted not having kept the promise he had made to go and take his orders at the Préfecture of police that evening. However the man who was carrying him stopped all at once, and without respect for the known delicateness of the poor fellow's frail limbs, let him fall on the ground. Isidore restrained a cry of pain; he was thinking of the threatened dagger.

"Undo him a bit, he must be near choking," said Loyal-Francœur's voice.

The piece of stuff which covered the hump-back's head was removed; he opened his eyes timidly. He was in a small room, with no window—none, at least, that could be seen, and lighted by one candle. Standing by him were Loyal-Francœur, revolver in hand, and another man, a giant, the one who had so gracefully lost so many games of piquet to him at the public-house in the Rue du Bac.

"Well Isidore," said the inquiry-agent, in a bantering voice, "then you're amongst us again? Good friends always meet again, you see. It's true you didn't come here of your own accord. But what does that matter? you're here; that's the principal thing."

"What do you want with me?" cried the unfortunate wretch, trembling in every limb.

"In the first place, to lecture you. What, ungrateful fellow, you whom I had heaped with kindness and good advice, you have made use of the experience I gave you to play the spy on me? For it was you I met the other day in the Rue Vivienne? No lies!"

"It's true, master," replied the hump-back, who had regained a little confidence; "I recognised you and I wanted to speak to you; but in your own

interests, to tell you what was going on, the dangers you were in, and to offer you my services."

"Fancy that! poor fellow! How easy it is to mistake peoples' intentions. And I had the idea that you wanted to inform against me."

"Oh, master, how could you think it?"

"No, no, my lad, I acknowledge the mistake and am sorry. Yes, you were following me for my own good. So I hope you told no one you had seen me, eh, Isidore?"

The ironical tone of this question clearly showed the hump-back that Loyal-Francœur was far from believing his explanation. However, he replied, though with a little hesitation:

"No, master, no one."

"Not even your old companion, Victor Borin?"

"Oh, him—well, I happened to meet him—by chance—"

"Yes, my friend. And it was also by chance that, having met the chief of police, you proposed to him to track me out. It was by chance, too, that you went to the Cité Maupy, where, happily, I had been too quick for you. Lastly, it was by chance that you went to Colonel de Rieumes' house, where you were able to satisfy yourself that Loyal-Francœur is stronger than you all and will crush you one after the other!"

The rascal's voice had become loud and harsh, his face wore a ferocious expression, his green eyes shot fire. The hump-back shuddered to the marrow of his bones.

"Yes, all!" resumed Loyal-Francœur, "beginning with you, who are in my hands now. And here, look you, my little fellow, I can, if I like, kill you torture you, let you die of hunger and thirst, at my fancy. These walls are deaf and dumb. And if your friends the police ever come to look for you, they would find nothing but a corpse."

"Mercy, mercy!" groaned the poor wretch, throwing himself with his face on the ground.

"Get up, fool. I don't want to kill you now. What good would it do me! You know well that I never do anything without a motive."

"Then what do you intend doing with me," asked the hump-back, fearfully.

"First of all, get rid of a nuisance; we shall see afterwards."

"Oh, master, on my eternal salvation I swear to you."

"All right, oaths are needless. I don't believe in them. I want deeds."

"Speak; what do you demand?"

"You shall know later; what is necessary for the present, is to remain quiet and keep your mouth shut. You will be locked in here. You needn't shout or call, it would be useless, no one would hear you, and besides, before going, we shall take our precautions."

He made a sign to the man who was there, and who had not said a word. Isidore shuddered on seeing this man, whose strength he knew, walk towards him.

"Do what I told you," said Loyal-Francœur.

The man, who was none other than Alcindor, took hold of the hump-back, whom he lifted like a child, and placed him on a chair. Then he bound him, fastened his arms to the arms, and his legs to the legs of the chair, so as to make it an impossibility for him to move.

"Now, let's leave him," said Loyal-Francœur. "My little Isidore, you can cry out if you think proper, but there's no one to hear you. But I

should not advise you to do so ; it might annoy me, do you hear ? I shall leave you for an hour or two. I'll let you know any orders when I return."

"I entreat you, master," began the hump-back.

"Enough ; rest your legs, you'll want them later on, and meditate in silence on this axiom, that it is better to have Loyal-Francœur for a friend than an enemy. I'll see you again presently. When I come back, I shall hope to find you compliant to my wishes."

"Oh, master, tell me what you want ; I'll obey you like a slave," cried Isidore.

"That's enough of it. You will know what I want, I tell you, when the time comes, and I hope that won't be long. Keep quiet now and reflect."

He put out the candle, called the dog, who came to him joyfully, and went out, followed by Alcindor, still silent. The hump-back heard two keys turned. He remained there alone, bound, in profound darkness, and ignorant of what was to be his fate.

## L.

### THE RANSOM.

THE place to which Monsieur Loyal-Francœur had taken Isidore was none other than the back-room of his office in the Avenue de Clichy. This back-room he had at first intended for the reception of Jeanne de Rieumes. But his meeting with the hump-back in the Rue Vivienne had, it may be remembered, caused him to alter his plans. Accordingly he had had the young girl taken to his friend Boudillon's "in-and-out." But in addition to the fact that she was very uncomfortable in the waggon, and liable to fall ill again, it would have been difficult to keep her there long without being seen by one of the neighbouring mountebanks. It was therefore necessary to devise some other plan quickly. Leaving his precious bag in Madame Honoré Broussel's care, he had dressed himself up as a workman and had gone to make a tour of inspection round Colonel de Rieumes' house, in order to arrange a plan for treating with him about Jeanne's recovery. Great was his surprise on seeing the chief of police, accompanied by Victor, the hump-back, and two rag-pickers from the Cité Maupy, get out of a cab and go into the house. How had they all met ? The hump-back had evidently been talking. Victor had evidently offered his services to the police. But how had they discovered the Cité Maupy so quickly ? The sight of Marquis, whom the hump-back took in his arms and carried out of the cab, was a ray of light. It was the dog who had guided his enemies !

"*Saperlotte !*" he said to himself, "and I who left him at home, for fear he should betray us ! An excess of prudence which turned out unfortunately. People are quite right when they say you can't think of everything." The little group had entered the house. Crushing his hat down over his eyes, Loyal-Francœur, pretending to be immersed in the placards, watched them come out. He saw the hump-back separate himself from the others, taking the dog with him.

"Where the devil's he going ?" said the inquiry-agent to himself, and what fresh trick is he thinking of playing me ? He's the most dangerous of the lot, that little scamp. If it had not been for him, I should have been as right as ninepence, in Marius Nogale's dark skin, and should have



conducted my little business in the Avenue de Clichy in peace. He's the one that has upset the whole arrangement."

The hump-back went his way, still followed by the dog.

"If I could only get hold of him," said Loyal-Francœur to himself. "He recognized me once, it's true. But he knows neither my new name, nor my home; I might make use of that convenient back-room yet. But how can I capture him? Ah, if only it was not daylight! But, impossible. And yet I can't pass the day in following him."

A sigh of relief escaped him. The hump-back had entered the public-house. He knew his former clerk's habits. When he once had a bottle in front of him, the chances were that he would remain there for an indefinite period. He looked through the window and saw that Isidore was being served with breakfast. He was happy. He hurried to the Tuileries, where he had left Alcindor waiting, and gave him his instructions; we know how they were fulfilled, and how the hump-back, having arrived at a proper pitch of drunkenness had been safely placed under lock and key. Re-assured on this point, Loyal-Francœur and the mountebank left the Avenue de Clichy and returned to La Villette. Madame Broussel was awaiting them there in the waggon, attending to Jeanne, in whom the emotions of the day before had provoked a fresh crisis. On seeing Marquis, she gave vent to a cry of joy, and the pug leapt yelping into his mistress's arms.

"You've been to fetch my dog," cried the midwife, "how nice of you!"

"Yes," growled Loyal-Francœur; "he has played us a nice trick. A little more, and he'd have had us all ruined."

"How?"

"That little scamp of an Isidore."

"Ah! I was certain of it."

"Do let me speak. The little hound took it into his head to go and fetch him and to get him out of the house; how, I don't know. The dog took him to the Cité Maupy."

"Impossible! He's so intelligent, my Marquis."

"Yes, intelligent enough to get our throats cut. Thanks. But it's a good job, I've caught him again. And now don't let him out any more, or else —" As if he had understood the threat conveyed in his last sentence, the dog went and hid himself quietly under a make-shift bed upon which Jeanne was lying.

"Now, go to sleep," said Loyal-Francœur. "I must be off again. I've got a good deal to do between this and to-morrow morning."

Louise had gone to fetch her mother, and had told her of Colonel de Rieumes' wish. Re-assured as to her son's fate, and rather confused by all these events, among which she was getting quite lost, the good woman had followed her daughter. Their arrival at his house had been a relief to the colonel. It had seemed to him that he was preparing for his daughter's return, and that Louise once installed in the Rue de Bellechasse, Jeanne would not fail to return soon. The unhappy indulge in these superstitions. Let them do so, they console them. For the first time, perhaps, for six weeks, M. de Rieumes slept tranquilly. He hoped for, he almost expected, good news. At eight o'clock the next morning, a footman came into his room. A "very urgent and important letter" had just arrived. M. de Rieumes opened it with a trembling hand. It was as follows:

"SIR,—When M. de Pringy proposed to you to restore your daughter in consideration of a sum of two hundred thousand francs, you thought fit to lay the letter before the police. That was very wrong of you. Your daughter was not restored to you, and I was put to considerable inconvenience. On this occasion, hunted down, persecuted for crimes that I was forced to commit, I write to you directly. Your daughter is still in my power, and I am still willing to restore her to you. Only, I have raised my terms. I must have three hundred thousand francs now. I have confidence in your straightforwardness. Write to me, *poste-restante*, at the La Villette office, initials L. F., No. 13, and say whether you consent to my proposal. I will inform you afterwards of the mode of interview which we can employ. Do not, as on the first occasion, be guilty of the folly of calling in the police. You would run the risk of losing your daughter altogether, and you would not capture me. I beg you to believe with what regret I am obliged to open up, in such a strange way, negotiations which I could have wished could have been more friendly. LOYAL-FRANCOEUR AND Co., Formerly of the Rue des Chantres.

"P.S.—This letter should reach you by the first post. You will therefore have time for reflection. Be good enough to arrange that I shall have an answer by five o'clock. I must leave France at once."

On reading this letter, at once threatening and ironical, the colonel was seized with a fit of terrible rage. Then he reflected and thought to himself that if, in fact, on the first occasion he had consented to the condition which the count proposed to him, he would have spared himself much grief, and would have obviated the sufferings which his daughter had endured. Yet, on the other hand, it was hard for an honourable man to connive at the escape of a wretch like Loyal-Francoeur, and to deliver a murderer from the hands of the law by giving him a considerable sum, almost a fortune, which would allow him, with his Protean talents especially, to go and live peacefully and happily abroad, in scandalous impunity. The colonel awaited the arrival of Clairac and the count, in order to confer with them. A lengthy discussion ensued. Pringy, who bore a justifiable spite against the inquiry-agent, was for attacking him with his own weapons, that is to say, by cunning and treachery, and for capturing him at any price.

"Is a man bound to act straightforwardly towards such a scoundrel?" said he. "How do you know that, when once he has received the money, he will keep his promise, and restore Mademoiselle Jeanne? When he was beyond the reach of suspicion, of course he might have done so. It was his plan to be only a go-between. But now—"

"Then what would you propose?" asked Clairac.

"To reply as he suggests, and to place in the post office two detectives, who will collar him when he comes to claim the letter."

"And supposing he does not come himself?"

"Then who would? An accomplice? By arresting him, we should get to know where they were to meet."

"No," said Paul, shaking his head. "Read this last sentence again: 'Do not be guilty of the folly of calling in the police. You would run the risk of losing your daughter altogether, and you would not capture me.'"

"Pure bluster."

"Has it not been your own experience, that this man has no need of bluster; he is master of the situation; we must knock under."

"What, yield to that scoundrel!"

"Well, do you want to see him carry Jeanne off again, on wanderings

which are killing her?" cried Paul, piteously. "Let us give him what he demands, as quickly as possible; what matters it, as long as he restores the poor child to us?"

"You are right, Paul. No, no more tricks, no more struggles. I shall write and tell this man that I accept his conditions and that I will remit my daughter's ransom as soon as possible."

"Very good," said Pringy to himself; "I'm neither father nor lover and shall go to work on my own account."

## LI.

### THE AMBUSCADE.

"THEY don't want me to inform the police," said Pringy to himself. "I can understand that. The police, once set in motion, will not stop. Now, there may come a time when it will be dangerous to go on—if Loyal-Francœur did not come himself, for instance—and if, by capturing his emissary, we risk losing the girl altogether—a thing which he threatens, but which I don't believe him capable of doing. So I shall think out alone the best thing to be done. As in the old days, when I commanded a squadron of hussars, I shall act as pioneer."

At this moment he saw Victor, who was returning from the Prefecture. As he had promised, the chief of police had explained matters to the magistrate in such a way as to exhibit him as more unfortunate than criminal. He had made M. Dauffin see that it was to the interest of justice to make use of the young man as an instrument in capturing the true culprit. When Loyal-Francœur had been arrested, they could try Victor with him and leave it in the hands of the jury. M. Dauffin had accordingly signed an order for his temporary release. Victor, his mind at ease, had gone to reassure his mother and sister. He learnt through the doorkeeper, who had suddenly become very gracious, that Madame Borin and her daughter were with Colonel de Rieumes and he hurried thither, all joy at this good news. After having given him time to kiss Madame Borin and Louise, Pringy made a sign to come and talk to him, and drew him into a window recess.

"You have heard the latest news?" he asked.

"No, sir; what is it?"

"Loyal-Francœur has written to the colonel."

"With what object?"

"To propose to him to restore his daughter, in consideration of a ransom of three hundred thousand francs."

"The wretch! And what did the colonel reply?"

"He accepts."

"But is he certain that it is not a fresh trap?"

"That is what I asked him; but he cares not."

"He will not inform the police and have the scoundrel arrested?"

"No. He is afraid of risking his daughter's life, and Clairac is of the same opinion."

"And you?"

"I? I determined to let them have their own way, and go in for action myself, and I counted on your assistance."

"And you were quite right. I consider that it would be a wrong step to allow that wretch to lay hands on the fruit of his crimes. My remorse

is great for not having unmasked him on the first day, and it is my duty now to repair that fault."

"Well spoken, young man. And now, this is my plan."

"I am listening, M. le Comte."

"In his letter Loyal-Francœur asks for an answer before five o'clock. Now, for that to be possible, it must be posted by two o'clock at the latest, so as to come within the afternoon delivery. Loyal-Francœur, who knows that and is distrustful, will be certain to go and fetch it or send for it earlier than he says."

"That's likely."

"We must go at once to La Villette. We will explain to the postmaster what is going on, and will ask him to conceal us behind the counter. When anyone comes to claim the letter, if it is Loyal-Francœur himself, we will spring on him and arrest him. If it is, as I should be inclined to believe, a simple messenger, we will follow him at a distance, so as not to be seen, and find out where he goes. In that way, we shall perhaps succeed in discovering where he himself is hiding, and especially where he is hiding his prisoner."

"Right; I'm at your service. There's only one thing that bothers me."

"What is that?"

"I should have liked to take Isidore. You know, the young man who was with me."

"The hump-back."

"Yes; he is intelligent and cunning. He might have been very useful to us. It was he who first discovered Loyal-Francœur under his disguise, when the police thought he was in Belgium."

"Well, bring him, what prevents you?"

"He has suddenly disappeared. He left us yesterday, to go to breakfast; he ought to have met us again at six o'clock at the chief of police's office. He did not come. An officer was sent to his lodgings in the Rue des Canettes. His landlord had not seen him for two days."

"That's strange. Has nothing happened to him?"

"I don't think so. More probably he has discovered some fresh clue and is following it up alone, in the hope of a good reward. It's very annoying. He might have been most useful to us. Well, perhaps he's doing good work alone."

"Well, let's say good-bye to the colonel and go. We'll have something to eat on our way."

"I'm at your orders."

The count went and shook hands with Monsieur de Rieumes, who had just been himself to post the answer which he had written to Loyal-Francœur. Full of the hope of seeing his darling Jeanne again, the old soldier felt himself revive and was already counting the hours which separated him from the appointment which Loyal-Francœur would no doubt make with him. Victor and M. de Pringy went and, as they had planned, made their way to the La Villette post office. The postmaster at first raised some difficulty at acceding to their request. But when the count had given him a formal promise that they were only making use of this strategem in order to try and recognise an individual; that they would only try and arrest him outside, and that consequently there would be neither commotion nor scandal in the office, he consented to admit the two men at half-past three. They went and had breakfast in the meantime and avoided showing themselves in the neighbourhood. At half-past three

exactly they returned to the office and the postmaster let them in and placed them behind a wicket close to that of the *poste-restante*. This wicket, of course, was closed. Half an hour, an hour, two hours passed. The two watchers began to be afraid that Loyal-Francœur had been warned of their presence by some unknown emissary, or had changed his mind and would not come at all.

"Perhaps he only mentioned that time in order to hurry the colonel," said Victor, "and doesn't intend to come till much later."

"Silence," muttered Pringy, squeezing his companion's arm.

Some one had just come to the *poste-restante* wicket, and in a squeaky voice, which was not altogether unknown to the two men, asked timidly :

"You don't happen to have a letter for the initials, L. F., No. 13?"

Victor and Pringy reached eagerly towards the wicket and stifled a cry of surprise.

"The hump-back !" they exclaimed together.

The hump-back, too anxious to notice what was passing inside the office, stretched out his hand with its skinny fingers to take the letter which the clerk was looking for.

"Now, let's follow him quietly," said Pringy.

"Ah ! the little serpent, the little traitor !" muttered Victor. "There's some fresh trick of Loyal-Francœur's in this. If he came to fetch me, if he feigned zeal, it was to get to know what we thought and carry it back to his master. Little dog, you shall pay for this !"

They went towards the door. The hump-back, having received his letter, went off. They followed him at a distance. He walked quietly to the omnibus office, where he took a ticket for Saint-Sulpice. The conveyance arrived, and he got on the top.

"Quick, Victor," said the count, "a cab."

Victor ran to the rank. The two men got into a cab and gave the man orders to follow the Saint-Sulpice 'bus. The Jehu calmly lit his pipe and started. Victor at one window and Pringy at the other did not lose sight of the hump-back, who was well in view on the top of the 'bus. At the halting-places the cab stopped in front of a door, and drove on again when the 'bus started. At Saint-Sulpice the hump-back got down and began to run in the direction of the Rue de Grenelle. He got as far as the Rue de Bellechasse and then made his way to Colonel de Rienmes' house.

"Well, that's rather too strong," said the count.

## LII.

### ISIDORE'S ADVENTURES.

"Stop, little wretch !" cried Victor, springing out of the cab, and seizing the hump-back at the moment when he was holding out his hand to ring the bell. "Stop and explain your conduct."

"Ah ! Monsieur Victor, I *am* pleased to see you !" cried Isidore, clasping his hands.

"Pleased ! Well ! talk about cheek !" began the young man indignantly ; but the count, pushing his elbow, interrupted him, and said in a much calmer voice :

"Monsieur Victor is very angry that you did not come to the Préfecture, as you had promised, and that you upset all the arrangements."

"Yes," continued Victor, understanding the count's intention, and mastering his anger; "yes, you prevented us from getting to work."

"It wasn't my fault, gentlemen. If you only knew what had happened to me. It was terrible, terrible!"

"And the dog? What have you done with the dog?"

"He has got it again, *he!*"

"Who?" asked Pringy.

"Loyal-Francœur."

"What! you have seen Loyal-Francœur?" cried the count, feigning surprise.

"Alas!"

"And you did not have him arrested?"

"On the contrary, he arrested me and imprisoned me a whole day and a night in a dark room. It's a novel, a regular novel."

"Nonsense! tell us about it," said Pringy. "I adore novels."

"Enough, Monsieur le comte," interrupted Victor, "don't let us listen to the wretch's lies. Let us make him come into the house first, and force him to explain his conduct."

"What conduct? What? What do you mean?" cried the hump-back anxiously.

"That we have just come from La Villette, you little scoundrel! and that we saw you go into the post-office and take the answer for Loyal-Francœur."

"That's true," said Isidore. "But if you'll only listen—"

"Listen to what? Lies?"

"Let him tell. But first let us go into the house."

They entered, and went up to the smoking-room.

"Now then, speak," said the count.

"Well, you must know, that yesterday I went quietly off to have breakfast at a public-house—a modest breakfast, as befits my position—and I don't know how it happened—Loyal-Francœur must have spies everywhere. They certainly made me drink a narcotic, for in a minute I fell asleep."

"You had probably drunk too much," remarked Pringy.

"Oh, no. Well, no matter. About six o'clock, shaking off my drowsiness, I went out to go to the Préfecture. When I arrived at the outer boulevard—"

"What, the outer boulevard, to go from the Rue du Bac to the Cité?" said the count.

"No, I'm wrong, I mean the quay. When I got to the quay I was seized by four men."

"At six o'clock in the evening?"

"Certainly. That proves their audacity. Four men seize me, gag me, carry me off and shut me up in a prison."

"Where?"

"How should I know? It was as dark as pitch. Armed with pistols and daggers, they kept me there all night. You can imagine my fright."

As may be seen, the hump-back exaggerated slightly the gravity of his adventures. But he thought that by dramatising the thing a little it would produce more effect on his listeners. It is only right to say that he succeeded very imperfectly, for neither Victor nor the count believed a word of his tale. But they made no remark, and waited till the end.

"And how did you get out?" asked Pringy.

"I'm going to tell you. After a night passed in mortal agony, and as I was wondering whether they had left me there to die of hunger, Loyal-Francœur and his acolytes enter—"

"How many of them were there, exactly?"

"There were only two of them, this time; but what could I do alone, worn out with fatigue, and my limbs cramped by the cords with which they had bound me, against two strong men?—What did I say, strong? One of them is a giant. But you must have seen him?"

"Where?"

"At the post-office, of course; he was there with me. But let me go on with my story."

"Go on, and hurry yourself," said Victor, who believed less and less of the hump-back's tales.

"Well," continued the latter, "they enter the room. Loyal-Francœur unbinds me, whilst the other man puts a bandage over my eyes. I have a great mind to tell them that, being as dark as it was, this bandage was superfluous; but they had shown me already that it was no good arguing with them, so I let them have their own way. When they had blindfolded me we went out, and I felt the fresh air of the street. I should have been glad enough to have a look round. But that was impossible. The sound of a train, however, which arrived and stopped, struck my ears. We were therefore near a station, and as we had not passed the barrier—I noted that fact afterwards—it must have been the Ceinture."

"Ah," said Pringy, who began to be interested in the hump-back's story.

"Wait a minute. We went a little way—along some large streets which ran uphill—and then turned to the left. It appeared to me that the street was more lonely. We walked straight on, for a long time. I ought to have counted the steps, but at the moment unfortunately I did not think of it. But we stopped once, and I was able to come to the conclusion that we were in front of some great workshop—a forge, or foundry, or something of that kind—for I heard the sound of the hammers and the roaring of the fires. All at once a dull roar sounded—another train passing—a train, amongst the noise of hammers. We were near the works of some railway."

"Well reasoned. Go on."

"After that we turned sharp to the right, then to the right again, and I could still hear the forge and the rumble of the trucks. We went over a bridge—a railway bridge, for an engine was whistling just under us—turned once more to the right, and we were in the square of La Chappelle. There they took the bandage off my eyes."

"Well?"

"Then the man who was with Loyal-Francœur took hold of one of my arms, and Loyal-Francœur of the other, and we walked along the boulevard. They had taken care to tell me that at the least attempt to escape they would kill me, so I was not at all inclined to do so. They led me to the Rue de la Charbonnière, and made me go into a public-house, and up the stairs to the first floor. It's a peculiar house. There are three rooms altogether, and you must go through the first two to get to the third, and there are swing doors to each one which shut of their own accord. We went into the third one."

"And how long did you remain there?"

"All day. The landlord, who, by-the-bye, was a curious-looking man, and more like a bandit than a tradesman, brought us up breakfast, to which, as you may guess, I did not do much justice. As for Loyal-Francœur

and the other man, they laughed, drank, and played cards. Once I started to go towards the window—a little window with cotton blinds carefully closed. Loyal-Francœur made a sign to the other man, who got up. I didn't move again. At last, at five o'clock, they called the landlord and paid the bill. Then they took me by the arm again and led me to La Villette-circus. There my former master gave me his orders. To go, in charge of another man, into the post-office, ask for a *poste restante* letter, initials L. F. No. 13, slip it into my guardian's hand and go away. And that's what I've just done."

"But, the letter?"

"The man took it away with him."

"And you did not call for help at the post-office and inform against the scoundrel?"

"Thanks, he had shown me an open knife that he had in his hand, telling me that at the first suspicious word that I spoke, he would stick it in my back."

"That man thinks of everything!" cried Victor, discouraged. "He had foreseen our step and had taken his precautions. Whilst we were running after Isidore the bearer of the letter had rejoined him in safety."

"He was certain enough that I should not amuse myself by following him," said the hump-back; "I was only too glad to get out of their clutches."

"But you could at least recognise the man who accompanied you there?" said the count.

"I should think so. And, between ourselves, I think that, thanks to my observations, I can do better than that."

"What! do you think you can find the house where they shut you up?"

"Not by myself!" said the hump-back, shuddering at the thoughts of it.

"But with a good escort to protect me."

"Well, let's try it; come along, quick!"

"No. Wait. During the day the appearance, and, above all, the noises of the street are different. We'll try to-night, after dark."

"All right. And, as you want an escort, we'll go and ask the chief of police for one. Does that suit you?" said Pringy, looking keenly at the hump-back.

"I should just think so. I sha'n't run the risk of falling into their hands then; they made awful threats, you know."

"Well, let's go to the Préfecture."

### LIII.

#### IN WHICH THE HUMP-BACK CONTINUES TO BE ON THORNS.

THE chief of police was at the Préfecture with M. Manuel, the commissary who had first taken in hand the San-Fernando murder case. But it was not in connection with this case that M. Manuel had come. M. Manuel had in his district a band of marauders who devastated gardens and hen-roosts. Orders had been given to the police to take the thing in hand, and the police had discovered nothing. Now, on the night before, the inspectors had arrested four great roughs in the act of climbing an orchard wall. So M. Manuel was in high glee, and had come expressly to enjoy this triumph. The chief of police had congratulated him good-humouredly. Knowing nothing of those petty jealousies which, unfortunately, in the police, as in



many other services, interfere with the working, and cause half the cases to end in failures, he had been delighted at the capture of the four ruffians, among whom he felt certain of finding some old acquaintances well and duly catalogued in his books, and very probably wanted by him for other misdeeds. M. Manuel's triumph was therefore a trifle incomplete. In order to console himself he thought he could do no better than rake up the old Rue des Chantres case and ask for news about it, which he knew in advance could not be good.

"And the celebrated Loyal-Francœur case?" he asked all at once, as if by chance, "how is it going on?"

"Oh, it's still going quietly on," said the chief of police, with his malicious smile.

"Then you haven't given it up yet?"

"I never give anything up. I sometimes lay a case down for a month, six weeks, more, if necessary. When everyone has forgotten it I take it up and study it afresh. In that way I've got rid of wrong first impressions and often see my way more clearly."

"Very curious. And, as regards this case, you still have hope?"

"More than ever."

"But yet Loyal-Francœur outdid you at every turn?"

"All the more reason why I should have my revenge. Such is the game, sometimes you lose, sometimes you win. I lost the first hand, I have a chance to win the next."

"And do you count on having this revenge soon?"

"Possibly."

"But the murderer has left France?"

"Who can tell?"

"Oh, my dear colleague," cried M. Manuel, carried away in spite of himself, "don't torment me any longer. You must know something new. I'm interested in the case as well. Tell me. What is it? What is your hope?"

"I hope for everything, and shortly."

"Then you have some fresh clue?"

The chief of police smiled again, went up to the fire-place, took a cigarette, lit it calmly, went and sat down in his arm-chair again, and said:

"Listen."

As he was opening his mouth to begin his story, Coirat, the usher, opened the door and handed a small piece of paper to his chief.

"Here," said the chief of police, after having read the paper, and holding it out open to his colleague. "Read for yourself."

"The Comte de Pringy, Victor Borin, and Isidore!" read M. Manuel with satisfaction. "What does it mean?"

"You will see. Show the gentlemen in."

Pringy, Victor, and the hump-back were shown in.

"Well, gentlemen, what news?" asked the chief of police. "My colleague, M. Manuel," he added, introducing the commissary.

"I recognise this gentleman," said Pringy, "it was he who arrested me."

"You don't bear me any ill-will, I hope, sir?"

"Not at all. You did your duty."

"Well, to business," said the chief of police. "There must be something fresh, for all three of you to come?"

"Something of importance, sir," said Victor; "Isidore has passed the night in the scoundrel's lair."

"Ah! then that's why we waited in vain for him last night. Where is the lair?"

"We are going to ask you for help to find it again. But he must tell you his story.

"I'm listening with all my ears; listen, too, Manuel. You may be able to help us with your advice."

Without noticing the possible irony of these words, M. Manuel prepared to listen. The hump-back began his tale. He omitted not a single detail.

The chief of police, after having handed cigars to his guests, had thrown away his own cigarette and was taking notes. When Isidore arrived at that part which related to the direction which he had followed, he took up a map of Paris and began to study it.

"It would be a decidedly difficult task to follow your wanderings on the map," he said, when the hump-back had finished. "But would it not be possible for you to find your way backwards?"

"That is what we came to propose," cried the count.

"That is settled, then. But we must have a picked escort."

"Is Fauvette there?" he asked, putting his head out of the door.

"Yes, sir, he has just come in."

"Call him, and Antheaume and Gustave."

The three inspectors presented themselves and awaited their orders in silence.

"We have a fresh clue for Loyal-Francœur," said their chief. "He is in Paris, defying us. We must finish him off. An opportunity presents itself to-night. Let us try and arrest him. Get ready, we shall start in ten minutes."

The three detectives bowed and went out.

"Are you coming with us?" asked the chief of police of M. Manuel, who was quite dumbfounded at all that had passed. "You've had a grudge for a long time against Loyal-Francœur."

"I'm quite willing. But I hope we shall be more fortunate than in the Rue des Chantres expedition," said the commissary, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Oh, who can tell. The best hunter may return with an empty bag, and especially with such game as this. Ask these gentlemen about the fresh tricks he has played us during the last week. You have known him already as an old man, a young one, a sham blind one, and how many more I don't know. He escaped from us disguised as a woman. A few days ago he was strolling about Paris with a south countryman's copper-coloured skin; the day before yesterday he recaptured Mademoiselle de Rieumes, by introducing himself as her father, and he was so well made up, that the witnesses hesitated, even in the presence of the colonel himself. Who knows what we shall find him? A policeman, perhaps. For my part," he added, laughing, "every time I go to the Palais I ask myself whether the magistrate is really the magistrate or only Loyal-Francœur in disguise."

"Why, the man's Rocambolus in person."

"No. Rocambolus employed in the defence of the oppressed and unhappy the talents which God had given him. This man employs his in theft and crime. And there's no hope of ever converting him."

"But at least you hope to make an end of him?"

"You see what we have to go on. A clue that we are going to follow

up after the fashion of the man in the Arabian Nights who had a corpse to carry. Unfortunately M. Isidore did not count his steps, like the tutor in the legend. We shall do our best. But here are our men. Let's be off."

They started for La Chapelle-circus. Once there, they blindfolded the hump-back, and the chief of police and Victor each took hold of an arm. Close behind them walked M. Manuel and his former prisoner, Pringy. Then came the detectives, wearing blouses, and not appearing to know the others, from whom they kept at a certain distance; prepared to come up at the first alarm, the first signal. From the circus Isidore followed without hesitation the Grande-Rue de la Chapelle. He was quite certain that it was by way of it that he had been conducted. But at the very beginning a difficulty presented itself. Must he turn off at the Rue Doudeauville or the Rue Ordener? Each of these has a bridge passing over the Northern line.

"Didn't you mention some place where you heard at the same time hammering and trains?" asked the chief of police.

"Yes."

"Well, let's turn up the Rue Ordener. That brings us nearest to the company's works."

They followed the road indicated. Suddenly the hump-back placed his foot in an enormous puddle of water, with which he drenched his companions.

"*Sapristi!* I'm wet through," muttered Victor, shaking his wet trousers.

"Don't grumble. I know this puddle. I got into it this morning. We turn here. We ought to be alongside the works."

"Quite right, we're in the Rue de Poissonier, which skirts the works," said the chief of police. "Only they are shut up for the night. That's the reason you don't hear anything."

"Good. Now which is the long and almost straight street on the left?"

"The Rue Championnet which joins the Avenue de Saint-Ouen and runs by way of the Rue Balagny, as far as the Avenue de Clichy."

"That must be it. Is there a station not far from it?"

"Yes, the Ceinture Station."

"That's the style. Take the bandage off my eyes. I can find the way now."

Victor cast an inquiring glance at the chief of police. In spite of all the hump-back's affirmations, in spite of the appearance of reality which his strange story had just begun to assume, he was not yet completely convinced. He asked himself whether all this rigmarole was not a pure invention of Isidore's fertile brain, or whether—which would have been still worse—it was not a plot of Loyal-Francœur's which was intended to throw them on a false scent, whilst the scoundrel committed some fresh crime. The humpback's proposal was as a ray of light to him. Isidore wished to profit by the darkness and the deserted neighbourhood to escape at the first favourable moment. He turned round and called to Pringy who was still walking behind with M. Manuel. A hasty conversation took place, at the end of which it was agreed that the bandage which covered Isidore's eyes should be removed, but that they should continue to keep hold of his arms.

"And at the first sign of flight, my dear sir," said Pringy, producing a revolver, "I shall put a bullet in your head. Don't imagine that I shall miss you. I can kill a swallow on the wing."

"It's needless," said the chief of police, "I've got firmly hold of him. Here, M. Victor, do as I do; it's infallible."

Passing his right arm under the hump-back's armpit, so as to hold the latter's arm like a lever on a pivot, he grasped his wrist in his right hand. With one simple movement he could thus have broken or dislocated his elbow.

"When a man is collared like that he can't move much," he said, smiling.

"But our good friend Isidore doesn't want to leave us, I'm sure."

"No," said the hump-back, with a sigh. "Yesterday in a sack, this morning guarded by a giant, and to-night held in two vices. Talk about adventures!"

"Now then, forward, quick!" said the chief of police.

The little troop moved on.

## LIV

### PREPARATIONS.

To return to Loyal-Francœur. When a lucky accident had placed his former clerk in his power his first thought had been to wreak his revenge on him. He was furious with him for having recognised him on the Place de la Bourse and for having thus thwarted all his plans, disturbed his tranquillity and troubled the new existence which he had made for himself, out of reach of suspicion and troublesome attentions on the part of the police. We have seen that, believing himself safe in his new identity, the ex-inquiry agent proposed nothing less than to take his old office in the Rue des Chantres again and to recommence his nefarious proceedings, until the time when it should suit him to seek an honourable retirement and peacefully enjoy a fortune, laboriously, if not honestly, acquired. The wretched little hump-back had caused all this fair dream to vanish. On finding him in his power, Loyal-Francœur had had a ferocious idea. He had thought of venting all his hatred and killing his prisoner, awaiting the time when he could adopt the same course towards that other individual who had first resisted him and who was now taking up arms against him—Victor Borin. He would have preferred Victor; but a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; and for the moment he had to be satisfied with Isidore. The unfortunate hump-back had thus run a very great risk. But Loyal-Francœur reflected. He had to get Colonel de Rieumes' answer. To go and fetch that answer was a delicate task. He bethought himself of utilising Isidore. Accordingly he contented himself with keeping him prisoner all one night. We have seen what precautions he took in taking him from the Avenue de Clichy to La Villette so that he should not be able to find his way again. He had given him his instructions, accompanied by the most terrible threats in case of treason. He felt certain that, terrified by his adventure, worn out by a night of agony, and, above all, menaced with Alcindor's dagger, the hump-back would obey blindly. Still wearing his mason's clothes—quite in harmony with the purlieus of the canal—he followed the two men as far as the post-office at the corner of the Rue d'Allemagne and remained there on the watch, pretending to light a "nose-warmer," innocent of all tobacco, and in whose bowl all the matches burnt fruitlessly away. He saw the hump-back, escorted by the mountebank, who followed him like his shadow, enter the post-office. A few seconds passed. The pretended mason, striking match

after match on the leg of his trousers, felt his heart beat and the sweat break out on his forehead. The door re-opened. Boudillon came out alone. He made an imperceptible sign which reassured Loyal-Francœur a little. Appearing at last to give up all hope of lighting his incombustible pipe, the inquiry-agent walked along as far as the corner of the Rue Bourret, where he stopped, in order not to lose sight of the post-office. Alcindor came up to him, looking quite unconcerned.

"Well?" asked Loyal-Francœur, in a whisper.

"I've got the letter," replied the mountebank.

"Give it here quick. Where's the kid?"

"He went straight in."

"No hitch?"

"None."

"Why doesn't he come out, then?"

"There he is."

The hump-back was just coming out of the post-office, looking sheepish. He looked to the right and left and walked towards the omnibus office.

"You see—" began the mountebank. But Loyal-Francœur clutched his arm.

"See yourself," he said, pointing to Pringy and Victor, who followed the hump-back out of the office.

"What?"

"Two detectives. They're after him."

"Let's be off, then. He might betray us."

"No, he suspects nothing. He's going. They can question him now. We'll go to your crib. I want to read the letter."

"It's important, I should think?"

"Very important. But enough said. Let's be off."

They walked up the street, passed the market and came to the Rue Secrétan. Then they glided through the booths until they came to Alcindor's waggon. Once there, Loyal-Francœur broke the seal of the envelope. His face betrayed the liveliest satisfaction.

"Good news?" said Boudillon, who was watching on his face the result of the letter.

"Very good, my friend, so good that this time I hope we've hit the mark."

"Ah, then you'll explain to me now, I suppose—"

"Explain what? and why? What do you want to know, so long as things go on all right? Do what I'm going to tell you, and if, as I believe, we conclude the business this evening, you'll have two thousand-franc notes extra in your cash-box."

"*Sapristi!* I sha'n't refuse. You've kept me on the trot long enough for nothing at all, and it's about time I saw the colour of your money. Well, what's to do to-night?"

"Make ready to get out of this place. Feed your horse, he'll have a good journey to go. In an hour from now we must start and shall probably travel all night."

"Where to?"

"I don't know yet. It depends. Is there a fair anywhere near?"

"Yes, the Reuilly municipality are organising a forest fête."

"Well, we'll pretend to be going to Reuilly, it will be a pretext. Hurry up, there's not a minute to lose."

"And you?"

"I've got to make a little trip. We'll start when I come back."

The mountebank went off grumbling. It appeared to him that Loyal-Francœur was treating him rather too much like a slave, and he began to be afraid that he was getting him to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the pleasure of letting him see him eat them afterwards. As for the inquiry-agent, he went towards the Faubourg du Temple and entered the first post-office. Then he asked for a closed telegram form and began to write as follows :

"COLONEL,—I have received your reply. It would have suited me wonderfully well if two men, ready to lay hands on me if I had appeared, had not been posted in the office to which it was addressed. You ought to have known that I should take my precautions, and they will tell you themselves how they failed. But I want no more double dealing. It is with you alone that my business is, it is to you alone that I shall hand over Mademoiselle de Rieumes. Be, therefore, at ten o'clock this evening, alone and unarmed, at La Fourche, that is to say, the corner of the Avenues of Saint-Ouen and Clichy. A woman will come up to you and will tell you to follow her. You will do so, and she will take you to your daughter. There a man will hand her over to you, in exchange for the three hundred thousand francs agreed upon, and will withdraw. If, by your orders or even in spite of you, any one accompanies you, if my messenger has the slightest reason for suspicion, if his retreat, the exchange once effected, is in any way interfered with, Mademoiselle de Rieumes will be stabbed before your eyes and you will see nothing but a corpse. Look to it ; I never threaten in vain, and all my precautions are taken."

After having read this letter over again, Loyal-Francœur carefully fastened it down and addressed it. Then, seizing the moment when the clerk, who was busy sending off a telegram, was working the handle and not looking at him, he placed it on the counter and walked quickly away. Following his instructions, the mountebank had fed and watered his horse, and the beast was even all ready harnessed. Loyal-Francœur opened the door of the "in-and-out." Madame Broussel was seated near the pallet upon which Jeanne was lying. The pug-dog was sleeping at the sick girl's feet.

"How is she ?" asked the inquiry-agent.

"Only so-so. She's rather delirious still, from the crisis. She thinks she sees her father and she's talking to him."

"Give her her draught. She must sleep to-night."

Madame Broussel got up without making any remark and went and fetched a bottle from the other end of the waggon. It was a draught of Aleindor's composition, a soothing draught, in which opium, as one may readily imagine, played the principal part. The midwife filled a dessert spoon and gave it to Jeanne : then she corked up the bottle again.

"Give her another spoonful," said the scoundrel.

"No ; it might be dangerous."

"Nonsense, these nervous girls can easily stand a double dose. Wait a minute, I'll make her take it myself."

He approached the bed. But Marquis got up and showed his teeth in a very significant manner.

"What's up with your dog ?" said Loyal-Francœur, surprised. "He wants to bite me now."

"I don't know. Since this morning, he won't leave her bed."

"He'll have to leave it soon, though."

"What do you mean?"

"That in a few hours I hope to be rid of her—in exchange for her value in shiners, that's understood."

"What! you've succeeded?"

"In coming to terms with the father. But wait a minute, Alcindor's calling me. It's time to start. Will you answer for it that she doesn't wake?"

"The effect of the draught ought to last at least five hours."

"Right you are. Stop there at her side. I must go out and help Alcindor."

## LV.

### THE EXCHANGE.

DURING the time that Victor, the Comte de Pringy, and the hump-back were arranging the evening's expedition with the chief of police, and whilst Loyal-Francœur and Alcindor, taking with them Madame Broussel and Jeanne, were starting for the Avenue de Clichy, the colonel, who had remained at home alone, received the inquiry agent's telegram. He reflected for a few moments. Perhaps this proposal concealed some fresh trap. But what did it matter? Weary of useless struggles and ruses, M. de Rieumes preferred to go right through with it. What risk would he run of being captured in his turn and held as a fresh hostage? Why? and from whom demand the ransom? Of being murdered? To what end, since he was willingly bringing the money that they had demanded?

"And, besides," he said to himself, looking at the clock in order to calculate the number of minutes which remained before it was time to start. "And, besides, what matters risking my life? Would it not have been ended, and should I not already have sacrificed it, if it had not been for the hope that I have always clung to of seeing Jeanne again. If she were lost to me, my murder would spare me committing suicide."

The clock pointed to nine. Without telling anyone, but fearful, on the contrary, of being seen and of provoking afresh some dangerous excess of zeal on Pringy's part, he slipped out of the house, carrying the three hundred thousand francs in bank-notes which he had realised during the day, and, as had been stipulated, without other weapons than his walking-stick. In a state of excitement which it is easy to understand, he walked to the cab-rank at the Pont-Royal, took a cab and drove to the Place Clichy. There he stopped the cab and went on foot towards La Fourche. Ten o'clock was striking when he arrived there. He cast an inquiring glance around him. No one was near but indifferent passers-by and a few quarrelsome drunkards who were coming out of a neighbouring tavern. M. de Rieumes went and stood by an advertisement-board, so as to be in the full light and more readily noticeable to those who were to fetch him. As he was bending forward under pretence of being able to better look at the advertisements, whose letters danced before his eyes, a woman of a certain age, muffled in a hood of black wool, pushed against him and whispered:

"Come!"

He turned round abruptly. The woman walked on down the Avenue de Clichy. He followed her at a few yards' distance. As she was passing

through the shadow cast by a block of dark houses she turned round and signed to him to come to her. He hastened his pace and did so.

"You are Colonel de Rieumes?" asked the woman, stopping.

"Yes."

"Have you brought what is required?"

"I have it on me."

"No one is with you?"

"No one, and I should add that, if my friends took certain steps this morning, it was unknown to me and against my will."

"I do not know what you mean. My only orders are to conduct you, *you alone*."

"Go on, I will follow you."

The woman walked on until she arrived opposite the omnibus office. There she stopped, took a key from her pocket, went up to a little cottage and opened the door. The colonel waited.

"Follow me," said the woman, going in, "follow me, and have no fear."

"I am not afraid," replied the colonel. "But—my daughter?"

"Silence, you shall see her."

They entered. The woman shut the door. The room in which M. de Rieumes found himself was pitch dark. An assassin posted there in advance would have had an easy task in killing him and taking possession of his pocket-book stuffed with bank-notes. He did not even give this danger a thought. His whole mind was fixed on his daughter, his dear daughter, whom he was at last about to behold again.

"Don't move," whispered the woman. "I'll strike a light."

The colonel heard a click like that of a spring working. Then the sound of a door shutting. At the same time a pale and uncertain light appeared. He was alone in a little office whose only furniture was a bench running round it. Opposite him was a glazed screen pierced by a narrow wicket and hung on the far side with thick curtains. It was through this screen that the feeble light came which shone in the room where M. de Rieumes was standing. His conductress, by pressing a spring, had opened a door hidden in the woodwork and had lighted a jet of gas or a lamp which was standing there all ready. The place to which Madame Broussel—for she it was—had conducted the colonel was no other than the office taken by Loyal-Francœur under the name of Marius Nogale. The light came from the back room in which the hump-back had been imprisoned the day before and where Jeanne now was.

"You are there, M. de Rieumes, and you consent to the bargain which I have proposed to you?"

"I consent," said the colonel, in a shaking voice, "but have done quickly."

"Give me first of all your word of honour that you have brought no one with you and that you will not seek, the exchange once made, to hinder our flight."

"I swear it on my honour," cried the wretched father. "But my daughter, my daughter!"

"Look!"

At this word the curtain flew suddenly back. A flood of bright light filled the room. M. de Rieumes felt all his blood fly to his heart. He caught hold of the edge of the wicket to prevent himself from falling. Opposite him, on a pallet bed, Jeanne was stretched, apparently asleep. She was still pale, and her emaciated face bore signs of the sufferings that



she had gone through. Her long hair, lit up by the gas-jets above her head, was lying in fair curls on the pillows of coarse material. A smile, caused no doubt by some pleasant dream, parted her coral lips. On her right and left Loyal-Franceur and the mountebank, their knives uplifted, seemed to be only awaiting a signal to stab their victim. M. de Rieumes uttered a terrible cry and made a movement forward, as if to smash the screen and rush to his daughter. But the daggers approached Jeanne's breast, who was still smiling.

"One step more and she is dead," said Loyal-Franceur's harsh voice. "Remember our agreement."

"What am I to do?" said the wretched father, not daring to move, so great was his fear of endangering his daughter's life or liberty.

"Count the money in our presence, there, at that wicket, which will open."

Issuing from the corner where she had been concealed, Madame Honoré Broussel advanced and opened the wicket. The colonel took his pocket-book out of his pocket and tried to count the notes. But his hands trembled and he could not keep his eyes from his child, who was still sleeping.

"Count them," said Loyal-Franceur to the midwife, "or rather, just take the packets. M. de Rieumes is too honourable a man to try and trifle with us in such a serious business."

Madame Broussel took the six packets of fifty notes each and gave them to Loyal-Franceur. The latter smiled, placed his knife on the bed, hastily examined the bundles and crammed them into his pockets.

"Right," said he, coolly. "You have fulfilled your engagement; it is our turn now. You can open the door and come and embrace your daughter."

Saying this, he walked towards the exit door of the back-room. His two accomplices did the same. But just as they were going out the midwife came back again.

"Where's my dog?" said she. "Marquis! Marquis!"

"Devil take him," growled Loyal-Franceur. "That cursed brute will get us hanged. Take him by the scruff of the neck and have done with it. We've got no time to dawdle away here."

The pug had gone to lie under Jeanne's bed. Madame Broussel seized and carried him off, without the colonel even noticing the incident. Loyal-Franceur had caught up his celebrated bag and was in full flight. As he had been at last permitted, M. de Rieumes had opened the door of communication and rushed towards the bed where his daughter was still lying asleep. Trembling, he knelt down at her side, and with a thousand precautions, like a mother who fears to awake her new-born child from its first slumber, imprinted a kiss on Jeanne's forehead. He uttered a terrible cry. Her forehead was icy cold. "Dead! dead!" he cried. And throwing himself back, he fell, overwhelmed with anguish, on the floor.

All at once the sound of hurrying feet was heard outside and eight men rushed headlong into the room. They were the chief of police, Victor, the count, the hump-back, M. Manuel and three detectives. Having arrived at the end of the Rue de Balagny, they had explored the houses one by one, scrutinising, listening, searching, on every side. A vivid gleam of light issuing from an open passage had struck them. They had gone in to examine, and had seen Jeanne, still stretched on the bed, still lighted by the two gas-jets.

"Mademoiselle de Rieumes!" cried the count.

"And the colonel!" said the chief of police, stumbling over the old man's motionless body.

"Dead, both of them!"

"No," said Pringy, laying his hand on the young girl's breast: "her heart is beating and her breathing is regular; she is asleep or else in a swoon."

"And the colonel, look, he's coming round."

"What the deuce has been going on?" muttered the chief of police.

"Wait, he'll tell us. Help me to lift him up," said M. Manuel, putting his arm round the colonel and placing him on a chair. M. de Rieumes was, in fact, recovering consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked about him with a confused stare. Then he gradually recognised the count, Victor, and the chief of police. Suddenly the remembrance of what had passed returned to him.

"Ah!" he cried, with a sob, "Jeanne, my daughter! dead! dead!"

"No. She is alive, she is saved!" cried Pringy, who was holding Jeanne's hands and beginning to feel them grow warm in his.

"You see," said the hump-back, who alone in the midst of this touching scene had remained self-possessed, "you see I was not lying. Look, here's the chair on which they made me pass the night; the cords that they bound me with are there still."

But no one listened to Isidore. They were all too much occupied with the colonel and Jeanne.

"She lives! You are sure of it?" cried the former, whom Pringy's assurance completely revived, but who did not dare to believe in so much joy.

"See for yourself, her hands are warm and her heart beats."

"Oh! good and merciful God!" cried the old man, raising to heaven his eyes full of gratitude. "God has restored to me my daughter, may His name be praised."

"Excuse me, colonel," said the chief of police gently, mastering his emotion and coming back to stern reality, "but if I am not mistaken, you came here by Loyal-Francœur's directions."

"Yes, sir; but what is that to me now? I have my daughter, I forgive the man and his accomplices."

"Certainly; but I don't forgive him, and even if I did, I have a duty to fulfil. Where is he? Where has he concealed himself? In which direction did he go?"

"I know not."

"You must know, sir," said the count, with a touch of severity, finding these questions very ill-timed, "you must know that M. de Rieumes cares little about pursuing the criminals, as long as his daughter is safe. And, besides, he was unconscious and could have seen nothing. So it is impossible for him to answer you."

"Granted, sir, but my duty is to try every means, and I am trying. So as the colonel has recovered, as Mademoiselle de Rieumes is alive, and lastly, since I can neither interrogate them nor be of any service to you, you will allow me to continue my task, by trying, for want of something better, to find the traces of those whom the law orders me to pursue. Good-night, gentlemen. Fauvette, Antheaume, Gustave, come with me."

"I shall come too," said M. Manuel.

"I should prefer, my dear colleague, that you remained with these gentlemen ; your presence may be necessary to them."

"Quite right, I will stop here. Good-night."

"Good-night. And now, forward !"

They left the room. M. Manuel, the count, Victor and the hump-back remained with the colonel at Jeanne's bedside.

"We must get some cabs," said Pringy. "In one of them we will place Mademoiselle de Rieumes, on the mattress upon which she is lying, so as to move her as gently as possible. In the other we will place the colonel, who has need also of much care."

## LVI.

### THE MARRIAGE OF BLOOD.

TWELVE o'clock was striking. At this end of the Avenue de Clichy, as also in the small streets adjoining it, no sound but that of the clocks, re-echoing one another in the distance, disturbed the silence of the pitchy night. Straining both eye and ear, the chief of police and his men proceeded quietly, trying to discover some clue which would put them on the scent. But where were they to go ? What direction had the scoundrels taken. Everyone was in bed. The last omnibus from the Odéon had put down its passengers on the way and was entering the yard empty, after which the gates were closed. No light in any window, not a foot-passenger. Yes, in the distance, near the barrier, where the excise-officers were playing cards round the stove, an uncertain light glimmered.

"A rag-picker," muttered the chief of police. "Let's question him, at any rate. Perhaps he will be able to tell us something."

Fauvette walked towards the man who was pacing slowly from right to left, and from left to right, swinging his lantern and seeking his harvest.

"Hullo, mate !" he cried.

The rag-picker came up to him.

"You haven't seen two men running away in the direction from which you've just come ?"

"I've seen several men. I don't know whether they were running away," replied the rag-picker in a surly voice. "What do you ask for ?"

"I'm a police detective, and I'm pursuing some murderers," said Fauvette.

"That's your look-out. Pursue them. I've nothing to tell you."

He was about to proceed on his way, but the chief of police, who had come up, stopped him.

"Hullo !" he cried. "I think I know you."

"That's possible," said the rag-picker, still in the same careless voice.

"I see lots of folks."

"You're from the Cité Maupy ?"

"And if I was, what's that to you ?"

"Why, it was you who found Mademoiselle de Rieumes," cried the chief, "and who came to my office to lodge information about her abduction from your house. Are you not Prosper Martin ?"

"The same. But, once more, why ?"

"Why, my man, don't you understand that the man that we are after is the same one that stole the young lady ! We've just discovered his place

close to here and he has had the infernal luck to slip out of our fingers again."

"The fellow with the green eyes ! The sham colonel ! I'm your man !" cried Prosper Martin.

"That's it ; and now, have you seen anything ?"

"Unfortunately, no ; but wait a minute. Yes, yes ; but it was not your man. Was there another man with him, and a woman with a dog ? The dog ! I seemed to know him. The dog belonging to the woman who used to come to our place, Mother Comfort's relation."

"Madame Broussel ?"

"Madame Broussel ! It was her, her and the two men. Of course. Why ever didn't I think of it before ?"

"What direction did they take ?"

"I saw them at the corner of the Boulevard Bessière. I was coming up the Rue Mercadet ; beginning my round here and working round to Montmartre. They were going quick ; the dog came and sniffed at me, and wagged his tail, as if he recognised me ; and he did recognise me. One of the men whistled and he ran off. They turned to the right. They appeared to be following the fortifications."

"Forward at the double," cried the chief of police. "We shall catch them up, perhaps."

"The basket can go to the devil, I'm going with you," said the rag-picker.

All five of them set off at a run.

On leaving the house in the Avenue de Clichy, Loyal-Francœur, Alcindor Boudillon, and the midwife walked rapidly to the end of the avenue. There they turned to the right, and judging that the dog would not try to escape now, Madame Broussel had put him on the ground. Then, feeling certain that they were not being pursued, they had slackened their speed. They had not far to go, however, for the "in-and-out" was standing in readiness close by, opposite one of the cités which open into the boulevard. On leaving the Rue Secrétan, the little caravan made their way to the Avenue de Clichy, and the waggon had pulled up outside the house. The two men then took Jeanne out and laid her on the bed in the back-room. Thanks to the sleeping draught which the midwife had given her, this operation had been carried out without difficulty. Loyal-Francœur had remained with her, whilst the mountebank went and placed his conveyance in a lonely place where he could easily find it again after their business was done, and Madame Broussel had gone out to meet the colonel. Everything having terminated satisfactorily for Loyal-Francœur and his accomplices, they went back to the "in-and-out" again, with the intention of driving off and covering as much ground as possible during the night. Once at a distance, in the country, they would leave the waggon to chance, and would take a train at some small station for the frontier. The waggon was there, as well as the horse, who, with his nose deep in the nosebag, was finishing up his provender. No one had noticed it, or, if they had, they had not been surprised at it. It often happens that mountebanks camp thus for one night, no matter where, and continue their journey in the morning. Loyal-Francœur was placing his foot on the steps which led to the inside, when Boudillon stopped him.

"Wait a minute," said he. "There's a little formality to go through first."

"What's that?" asked the other with surprise.

"Settling our account."

"Ah, quite right. But there's plenty of time, I suppose."

"Not at all. There's no knowing who may live and who may die. Short reckonings make long friends. You're taking it rather cool."

"All right," said Loyal-Francœur, crossly. "Here you are, here's what we agreed on."

He took a pocket-book from his pocket, went up to the lamp and took out four five-hundred-franc notes which he handed to his companion. The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"You're having a lark, I suppose?"

"Why? wasn't this what I promised you?"

"Yes, when I knew nothing. But now I know the importance of the affair, I want my half."

"Your half!" cried the inquiry agent, with surprise, not unmixed with terror.

"Share and share alike, like two good comrades. No swindling between man and man now. We've worked together, it's the 'marriage of blood.' One of us is as good as the other. Come on, out with the 'flimsies,' and quick about it!"

The tone in which the mountebank spoke proved clearly that there was no use arguing with him. As for resistance, that was not to be thought of. Strong and courageous as Loyal-Francœur was, he was no match for the giant. For a second he thought of using his revolver. But owing to the nearness of a fort occupied by a troop of soldiers, the risk was too great. He might therefore as well make up his mind to part. That was what Loyal-Francœur did, in spite of his rage and the yearning for revenge which tortured him. He took out slowly, one by one, as if he had been drawing his teeth, the notes which the colonel had given him for Jeanne's ransom. Alcindor watched him. Loyal-Francœur was looking at these notes from which he was about to be obliged to part. He gazed at them fondly, seeming hardly able to take his fingers off the soft and silky paper.

"Well, have you nearly done?" asked the mountebank roughly, placing his large, heavy hand on Loyal-Francœur's shoulder. The inquiry-agent shuddered.

"Yes, here you are," he said in a choking voice. "Here, dog, take them, catch hold."

"You're not very polite," said the mountebank, laughing, "but I'm not thin-skinned. And, besides, actions are better than words," he added, picking up the notes, which Loyal-Francœur had thrown on the ground. "Now that we're quits, and good friends, we can go on. Get in."

In spite of his fury, Loyal-Francœur took up his bag and got into the waggon, Madame Broussel was already there with her dog. Alcindor began to raise the ladder which served as a step. Suddenly the sound of hurrying feet was heard in the distance.

"What's that?" cried the mountebank, straining his ears.

"Some one running," replied Loyal-Francœur, leaning out.

"Can they be after us?"

"Who?"

"Why, the police that the old man has set on our track. And, look, they've got a lantern. Get in, get in, quick, and let's be off."

He thrust the ladder into the van. But the dog had been too quick for him and had jumped out.

"Marquis, my dog!" cried the midwife.

"Damnation!" said Loyal-Francœur, "always that cursed dog. Catch him quick, Alcindor, or we're cooked."

But the dog had no intention of allowing himself to be caught. Slipping away from the mountebank, he started barking furiously.

"*Mille tonnerres!*" said the scoundrel. "This puts the finishing touch to it. Come here, you brute!"

"Kill him!" cried Loyal-Francœur.

Alcindor launched a furious kick which sent the unfortunate pug flying yards away.

"Wretch, don't hurt my dog!" cried Madame Broussel, trying to get out of the waggon. But Loyal-Francœur held her back with his iron grasp, whilst the mountebank, running up to the dog, who had got up with difficulty, kicked him furiously.

"Ah! cowards! cowards!" cried Madame Broussel, quite beside herself at this horrible sight. "Marquis, Marquis! good heavens! he's killing him. Help! help!"

"Will you keep quiet!" shouted Loyal-Francœur, placing his hand over her mouth! But she bit it to the bone, and, profiting by the movement which the pain caused him to make, she began to call out again at the top of her voice:

"Help, help! murder!"

The sound of steps came nearer. Two or three men appeared in the distance on the dark boulevard, one of whom carried a lantern in his hand.

"Murder! Murder!" cried the midwife once more.

"So much the worse for you, you will have it," said Loyal-Francœur in a hissing voice, plunging his knife into her breast. The unfortunate woman uttered a groan and fell out on the road.

"Gallop! gallop!" cried the scoundrel. "Quick, they're overtaking us.

The detectives, in fact, were only a few yards off. Springing on to the shafts, Alcindor lashed his horse, which started off at full speed. It was none too soon. The chief of police came up, followed by his men. As he was looking after the waggon, already disappearing in the distance, he stumbled over some object. He bent down. By the flickering light of the lantern which the rag-picker carried he saw a woman lying on the ground in a pool of blood, and a dog, crushed out of shape, its ribs broken, its head half smashed, who, raising himself in a supreme and painful effort, ed to lick once more his dying mistress's hand.

"The midwife!" he cried, in amazement.

"And her dog, the one that brought you to the Cité Maupy," added the rag-picker. "However do they come here, killed, both of them, and what fresh mystery does this crime denote?"

"Sir," said Fauvette, "the scoundrel wanted to force us to stop from pursuing them, and they sacrificed the woman and the dog."

"The two beings who are no use to them henceforward. That's the slave-driver's plan, who, when he is chased by a cruiser, throws into the water the slaves who are ill or useless. The system is cruel, but clever."

"What shall we do?" asked Antheaume.

"We can't leave this unfortunate woman here. She is not quite dead. Although she's not worth much, we must see to her. One of you run to the

Berzélius station—it's the nearest, I think—and fetch a stretcher ; we'll take her to the Beaujon Hospital."

"But the rascals will escape," cried Fauvette.

"What can we do ? They're too far off already. And, besides, they have a horse, and a good one too. We can't follow them."

"It's hard, just the same," muttered Fauvette between his teeth, "to be always getting that man within reach and then seeing him slip through our fingers."

"His time will come, my lad. In the meantime, fetch the stretcher, quick ; that's of the most importance at present. Under a doctor's care the woman may be able to speak again, perhaps."

The detectives set off in the direction of the Rue Berzélius, which was close at hand, and where there is a police-station. A quarter of an hour afterwards Madame Broussel was placed on a stretcher, which Gustave and Antheaume carried. The rag-picker lifted up the dog and placed him in the apron of his blouse.

"Hallo !" said the chief of police, looking about him, "where the deuce is Fauvette ?"

But no one could inform him. Fauvette had disappeared ten minutes ago.

## LVII.

### THE QUARRIES.

FOR a long time the horse kept up his rapid pace, but at last he was obliged to slacken speed. He was tired and covered with foam. They had gone far, however, and were certainly beyond pursuit. On the long network of roads which surrounds Paris within the fortifications they had not encountered a single living soul. Even supposing that the police had continued their pursuit, it would be impossible for them to know which way they had gone, and if chance led them, too, to make the round of Paris, they could not come up within an hour or an hour and a half. Accordingly, the mountebank pulled his horse into a walk, and knocked at the door of the "in-and-out," which Loyal-Francœur had closed. The inquiry agent was in a gloomy state of mind. Not that he felt any remorse for the crime that he had just committed, no, we know that he was capable of no such feeling ; but he was tormented by anxiety. In the first place, he was afraid, in spite of the horse's rapid pace, of not escaping from his enemies. Then, however degraded was his heart, he had a kind of affection for Madame Broussel—a matter of habit, perhaps—and he was vexed at having been under the necessity of killing her. Lastly, he was afraid that he had not killed her on the spot.

"Supposing she came round again and betrayed me," he said to himself. To this vexation and uneasiness was added yet another. The hundred and fifty thousand-franc notes which he had been forced to give to Alcindor had caused him more woe than the loss of his old friend, and he wondered with terror whether Boudillon would be contented, and not despoil him of the remainder. No. Monsieur Loyal-Francœur was anything but cheerful. When he saw the door open, and his accomplice's head appear, he started and clutched his revolver.

"Now then, no nonsense," said the mountebank. "It's me, M.

Loyal. "We came a good pace, and my horse is half foundered. I want a talk with you, to settle what we're going to do."

Partially re-assured by these words, and especially by the cool voice in which they were said, Loyal-Francœur put his revolver back in his pocket.

"What are we going to do? Upon my word, I don't know. Are we safe from being overtaken, at any rate?"

"Oh, I can promise you that."

"Well, let's talk it over. What's your opinion?"

"Well, for my part, I thought of being able to live quietly, like I did before, lifting weights, pulling out teeth, selling pomade, and such like. But since yesterday you've dragged me out in the light of day, and I'm easily recognised. The police have got my exact description by this time. I couldn't show my nose in Paris, without running the risk of being nabbed."

"Well?"

"Well, things being like that, I think the best thing to be done, for you as for me, is to give ourselves a change of air, and quickly."

"Yes, but how?"

"Although my horse is about done, he can go a few miles yet, with care. We'll drive along a road parallel with the railway, and get into a train at some station or other."

"Yes," said Loyal-Francœur, thoughtfully, "that was my first plan. But I've changed my mind now; I shall stop."

"What! stop in Paris?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I have my idea."

"But—?"

"I don't think of the money only. I promised myself something else; I want to have my revenge on two people."

"Which two, if it's not an impertinent question?"

"First, Victor Borin, without whom all this would not have happened."

"The man who let the girl escape from Nogent?"

"That's it."

"And the other one, who is he?"

"The humpback."

"The humpback? *Sapriste!* you had a good enough chance to take your revenge on him when you had him shut up in the crib yonder."

"Yes, but I had need of him then, and I never break a tool which may be of use to me again."

"Ha, ha! old fox," thought Alcindor. "Then you'd be glad enough to get rid of me, now that you've got no more dirty work for me to do. It's useful to know that."

"So I shall stop," continued Loyal-Francœur. "As for you, Alcindor, there's nothing to keep you in France."

"When I come to think it over," said Alcindor, "I shall stop too."

"But the police know you?"

"I shall disguise myself. Look here, old Loyal, play fair, for once in your life. You wanted to 'have' me, and I let you see that Alcindor Boudillon was not so easy to 'have.' You're hatching something now. You want to stop in Paris for that reason, and you're going to run a risk, in order to find a comrade who's not quite so hard to satisfy as me. Well, I'll be satisfied with one third of the swag, if swag there is, and though you've just shown me that you're pretty hard to get over, I think I could



be useful to you when you come to settle accounts with Victor and the humpback."

"But where should we go, the two of us?"

"Where were you intending to go yourself?"

"To a friend's, to ask for shelter."

"A friend, and get sold. Come now! You're never so sure of one another as when you're 'wanted' for the same crime. Us two, that's the style. Look here, do you know what my idea is?"

"No. Tell me."

"Well, we're not far from the Buttes Chaumont. We'll take all the best of what's in the 'in-and-out.' Then we'll take the waggon to the canal and heave it in, along with the horse. The waggon's known. When they find it there to-morrow they'll think we were in it."

"Well reasoned. And we?"

"We? While they're looking for our bodies in the canal we shall be coolly hiding away."

"But where, where?"

"In some place where they'll never look for us, where the police will never think we should risk ourselves with our banknotes, for as a rule there's no one there but starving vagabonds—in the quarries."

"The quarries!" repeated Loyal-Francœur, shuddering.

"Yes; why, one would think the name frightened you."

"Not at all. The quarries let it be. I shall have something to propose to you when we get there." And he added to himself, "You want to get me into a trap. But I'm as cute as you, and I'll keep you waiting about on the chance of making something more of me."

Determining, on his part, not to let him out of his sight, Alcindor took the horse by the bridle and led him towards the canal. There, after having taken a little bag from waggon and placed his banknotes in it, he brought the horse up on to the bank; then, suddenly, he pricked him with the point of his knife. The animal started, reared, and sprang forward. A loud crash was heard. Waggon and horse had disappeared in the dark water.

"Now follow me, Loyal. I'll show the way," said Alcindor.

At the base of the Buttes Chaumont, or rather the Buttes Saint Chaumont, as they were called before our anticlerical days, at the side of the tunnel of the Ceinture Railway, is the huge recess which forms the entrance to the celebrated labyrinth of the quarries. They are not, like the caves of Fingal and Adelsberg, or those of Rancogne, in the Angoumois, or the caverns of Cevennes, the work of nature. The quarries, like the quarries and catacombs on the left bank of the Seine, have been dug out by the hand of man. They are simply plaster quarries. But what quarries! Their produce, if we are to believe *New Paris*, published twenty years ago by the late Emile de la Bédollière, suffices not only for the needs of the capital, but is exported all over the world. Thanks to the canal, up which the vessels come to load the sacks of plaster, the cargoes can go direct to Havre, and from there to every quarter of the globe. America especially consumes enormous quantities of plaster of Paris, which is more workable than any other, is easily moulded, when fresh, and which, when once dry, is as hard as stone. To the Yankee, who buys his pictures by the square yard and his statues by the cubic foot,

this plaster is an unspeakable boon, for, thanks to it, he can reproduce rapidly and at a moderate price the sculptures of the Hôtel-de-Ville or those of the Arc de Triomphe for the adornment of his villa. Accordingly, owing to this large demand, the quarries have assumed colossal proportions. In 1870 they had a superficial area of more than six acres, and since then have steadily increased. "There is no sight so imposing and so terribly superb as the interior of these vast catacombs," says the author of *New Paris*. "The massive pillars standing at stated distances to support the roof of the quarries, the light of the torches appearing here and there through the gloomy perspectives, the water which oozes from the ceiling and drips into the puddles with a musical sound, the distant songs of the miners—all this is to be met with in this haunt of gloom. Sometimes, too, the cry of "*Sauve qui peut!*" is heard. Then the lights fly right and left; absolute silence reigns for a minute; then a detonation causes the mountain to tremble to its very foundations, and anyone visiting the spot for the first time might think that some catastrophe had happened. But directly after the explosion the lights return to their points of departure, and the songs begin again louder than ever; it was the springing of a mine." The quarries are legendary, like the catacombs of Paris. They are spoken of in more than one novel and drama, and they are always spoken of as being the haunts of vagabonds and thieves. And, in fact, after nightfall, in spite of the precautions of the watchmen, the vast caverns become the refuge of a crowd of poor wretches, hiding—some to escape from the hand of the law, others to avoid tramping the streets. They conceal themselves in abandoned workings, at the risk of being crushed to death by falling masses, or else, in winter, they lie in the kilns which are still hot from the last burning, and it is no rare occurrence to find in the morning some poor devil smothered or roasted. From time to time a police raid purges the quarries. The next day all the vacancies are filled again. To those taken off to the Dépôt others have succeeded, and even those who appear in crowds before the magistrate are eager, their terms of imprisonment over, to go and take up their old quarters in their dear quarries.

It was to this place that the mountebank took Loyal-Francœur, and the latter felt by no means comfortable at the prospect before him. The fact was that, unlike his companion, Loyal-Francœur had never experienced a life of struggling misery. Crouching in his office, preying upon society more surely there than those who loaf about the streets after dark, he had made up his mind never to remove the mask until forced to do so. Now everything was upset, for the moment at least, and he was obliged to act accordingly, and, being at Rome, do as the Romans did. He timidly followed his companion. Alcindor, on the contrary, who seemed to have had a long experience of the quarries, made him enter by a fissure which was hardly perceptible and almost entirely concealed by clumps of shrubs.

"We're going to camp here; then?" asked Loyal-Francœur, a trifle uneasily.

"Lower, if you please; Loyal," said the mountebank, lowering his sonorous voice. "There may be some ears about that it won't do to trust our secrets to. No, we sha'n't camp here, this is only a halt. You'll see why directly."

From the little bag that he had brought he took a dark lantern, struck a match and set a light to the wick, which began to burn, smoking and sputtering the while. Then he raised the lantern above his head.

"Here, look here," he said.

Loyal-Francœur looked up and saw the roof of the arch cracked in all directions and held up by beams of wood all worm-eaten and falling in pieces. He uttered a cry of terror and fled towards the gallery which he saw in front of him.

"Stop!" cried Alcindor, "stop, *sacrébleu*! you'll fall into the 'mustard.'"

To those of our readers whom this purely local term may astonish, we must explain that what is known in the quarries as "mustard" are those places where the stagnant water, mixed with chalk-dust, mud, and refuse of every kind, forms a kind of bog, whose surface, solid in appearance, gives no suspicion of deepness or danger. These spots are therefore exceedingly dangerous and as treacherous as the quicksands of Brittany, or those of the Sandes, in which a man disappears before help can be given him. The workmen themselves, in spite of their lamps and their knowledge of the quarries, often fall victims to them. Nothing sounds more appalling to a miner than this cry—an odd one to a stranger—"A man in the mustard!" Loyal-Francœur did not know the term. He stopped, however, foreseeing some danger, and asked:

"What's the 'mustard'?"

"Why, that grey spot close by you. Don't you know the colour? If you'd taken one step more, it would have been all up with you. No more Loyal or this terrestrial globe. He would have been in the 'mustard,' and, once in the 'mustard,' there's no getting out."

"All right," said Loyal-Francœur, who had little taste for this kind of pleasantry. "Take me to some other place, and don't talk so much."

"Come along, then, and be careful."

With infinite precautions he began to walk on. The inquiry agent, a prey to ever-increasing terror, followed him, pale and agitated.

"Here," said the mountebank, on arriving at a kind of octagonal chamber at the end of the gallery, "here's a place that'll suit us splendidly and be out of the way of prying eyes. You might commit a murder in it," he added, laughing, "and no one would be any the wiser."

Loyal-Francœur shuddered. What did these words mean? Tempted by the hundred and fifty thousand francs which he knew remained in the bag, did the mountebank intend to murder and rob him? A happy inspiration struck him.

"Is that so?" he said, "are we certain not to be heard? Well, now I can tell you, my old Alcindor, that what we've done is nothing. We've got to take more than double, more than treble."

"Where?" cried the mountebank, whose eyes glistened.

"I'll tell you to-morrow. I've need of rest now. Let's go to sleep."

"Right," said Alcindor.

They stretched themselves on the damp plaster, their heads resting on the bag which contained their treasure. But neither of them slept. Alcindor, whose appetite was whetted, was dreaming of future booty. Loyal-Francœur, ill at ease, was expecting every moment to be attacked by his accomplice. Every movement that the mountebank made caused his heart to leap, each drop of water which, oozing from the roof, fell with a dead sound on the floor, seemed to him like a murderer's footstep. Day came upon them, restless, tormented, and worn out with fatigue.

## LVIII.

## THE TRIBULATIONS OF A REPORTER

ON the morning after this eventful night Gratien Voiville got up late. He had spent the night at a ball, and, tired out by an interminable cotillon, led by him with a *furia* which had drawn upon him the praises of all the ladies, he had gone to bed promising himself a lazy morning. He had, moreover, no case in hand, for he no longer reckoned that of the Rue de Chantres, classified and abandoned long since, so he thought, by the police. He had shoved his notes on it into a drawer, until some chance, if ever one happened, should give him an opportunity of taking them out again. He did not get up until twelve o'clock, and a rapid glance at the principal morning papers having set him at his ease, he set out for the restaurant where he breakfasted almost every day. There conversations with two or three friends were productive of nothing fresh. Everyone was hard up for news and obliged to go to the drawers to try and rake out something of interest.

"Not a crime, not a fire, not an incident!" said Lapeyne, the Toulousian, with his Southern accent. "Absolute dearth!"

"I've had to kill a centenarian," replied Ackermann.

"And I to fish out half a column about the Carnival that had been kicking about for the last week, and had been given twice already to the compositors."

"The murderers are giving us a rest," said Dick de Courlay.

"We shall have to go to work ourselves."

"The Pierre Petits of reporting."

"I say, Lapeyne, supposing you killed *yourself*, eh? It would make some 'copy' for your friends. What do you say? Now for it. We'll give you a splendid biography."

"Thanks for the preference."

"Have you got anything fresh, Voiville?"

"I've only just got up."

"*That* won't fill two columns."

"Oh, they managed to do so every day during the siege, with this sentence: The country is rising! You might do it again with this one: Voiville has risen!"

The room gradually emptied. Gratien Voiville finished his breakfast, lit a cigar and strolled to the office. As he was going in with the placidity of a man who has absolutely nothing to do, he was informed that the editor wanted him. He went to his room.

"Have you the details of last night's affair?" asked the editor.

"What affair?" said Voiville, falling from the clouds.

"What, you don't know of it? Whatever have you been doing? A woman murdered on the outer boulevard. Look, here's the message I've just received." He held out a piece of paper. It was one of those bits of information that good-natured souls often throw into the editors' boxes. It simply stated that a murder had been committed on the boulevard, near the Clichy Gate. The informant had seen the victim—a woman—at two o'clock, being carried on a stretcher by four men.

"I hope you'll go and make up for lost time as soon as possible, and that

you won't allow yourself to be cut out by the other papers," said the editor rather severely. "Just fancy if I wasn't here. *I'm* obliged to tell *you* about the crimes."

The reporter might have retorted that there was no great merit in that. But he had no time to argue. Putting the message in his pocket, he rushed downstairs. His first act was to jump into a cab and drive to the Préfecture of police. There they would give him a rough idea and some useful information. He went up to the office where the policemen's reports are communicated—after expurgation. He turned over the papers feverishly. Nothing. He hurried off to the municipal police office. There they deigned to give him a little information. But so little! The policeman's report mentioned solely that at one o'clock a detective had come to the Berzélius station to fetch the stretcher for a woman who had been murdered. But who was the woman, and under what circumstances had she been killed? No one knew. The report mentioned the return of the stretcher, but that was all. Voiville rushed down the three flights of stairs, jumped into his cab again and drove to the Batignolles police-station, which is near the Rue Berzélius. After he had sent in his name, the commissary received him very graciously, called him into his room, paid his paper some compliments and referred to the interesting news contained in it every day, praised such and such an article, but declared to him that he knew not a word about the murder of which he asked for news.

"It's certainly not in my district," he added. "The news is false, or else there has been some confusion. Perhaps it's only an accident, in which my presence is not called for. That's why I have not been called. But go and inquire at Beaujon. They'll know something there, perhaps."

Voiville got into his cab again and hurried to the Beaujon Hospital. There he had to lose another half-hour in talk. At last he was shown into the manager's room. The latter asked him what was the motive of his visit. The reporter informed him.

"A woman who came in during the night," said the functionary, reflecting. "Certainly. Wait—yes, an elderly woman; she had been stabbed in the breast."

"Ah! at last!" cried the reporter. "At last I've got hold of something. Just fancy, sir, for the last two hours I've been scouring Paris over this business, and haven't been able to get a scrap of real news. I've learnt *something* from you, at any rate. In the first place, what is the woman's name? How was she wounded? Under what circumstances was she discovered?"

He had taken out his note-book and was preparing to take notes.

"My dear, sir," said the manager, with a contrite air, "nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be of assistance to you. Unfortunately, we've had formal instructions in this woman's case. She was sent here by the chief of police. No one is to see her, no one is to hold any communication with her, so naturally, we cannot give you the slightest information."

"What? Not even the nature of her wound?"

"Yes, I have already told you that: a stab in the breast, and her condition is absolutely hopeless. I cannot understand even how she has lived for so long, and every minute I expect to hear of her death. If the capture of the murderer depends on her information!"

Here was a fresh disappointment. Gratien Voiville was beginning to despair. What would he do? Where go to now?

Where? Why to the chief of police, of course. He hurried to the Pré-

lecture, ran up the stairs leading to the offices, and rushed like a whirlwind into the waiting-room.

"The chief is out," said the porter. "He said he should possibly not be in again to-night. M. Droz is going to draw up the report."

M. Droz is a chief inspector, who with Inspector Fouassy—one of the veterans of the Préfecture—dates from Louis Philippe, and who hurled a missile at Caussidière on the day when that ferocious democrat invaded the Préfecture in 1848. A slave to duty, good old Droz never breathes a word of what happens, and, so as not to be tormented, invariably says that he knows nothing. Voiville therefore did not even dream of asking him. Where could the chief of police be? At Beaujon, perhaps, taking the woman's depositions? Ah! it was enough to kill anyone with shame and rage. And the editor was expecting the most circumstantial details! Voiville did not dare to show his face at the office again. An idea struck him, for want of something better.

"Suppose I went and looked up my friend M. Manuel?" he said to himself. "Perhaps I shall get to know something through him. I'll tell him my position. 'Tis a question of life and death for me. I'm a ruined man if I don't have at least ten lines about this affair." He drove to the Saint-station. Such had been his disappointment during the course of the morning, that he was almost prepared to find no one in. When bad luck begins to pursue a man, it follows him to the end. To his great surprise, therefore, he found the office open and every one all agog. He went in and gave his name. Péraud, the inspector, placed his finger on his lips and dragged him into a corner.

"There's something fresh going on," he said.

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, the commissary was out all last night."

"Last night!" cried the astonished reporter, who wondered to himself whether he was going to find out by chance the solution of the mystery that he had been vainly trying to discover for the last three hours.

"And he's closeted now with the chief of police."

"With the chief of police! Then it is that; the boulevard affair, the murdered woman that they've taken to the Beaujon Hospital," said Voiville, hardly able to contain himself. "That's it, isn't it?"

"Hush!" said Péraud. "You'd get me into trouble, if the gov'nor knew I'd been talking to you. Wait a minute. I'll send your card in. If they admit you, you will appear to know as much as they do."

"Thanks, Péraud," said the reporter. "Be easy, I'll make it all right for you."

The inspector took Voiville's card in.

"Show him in, show him in!" cried M. Manuel, delighted.

"Who is it?" asked the chief of police.

"A friend of mine, a journalist. He may be of use to us."

"How?"

"Hush! here he is."

"Well, my dear fellow," cried the commissary joyfully, on seeing Gratien Voiville enter; "you've come to ask about last night's affair, eh?"

"Yes," said the reporter, with a knowing air, "a woman murdered at the Clichy Gate, wasn't it?"

"You know it already? Well, upon my-word, you fellows are astonishing. But do you know the woman's name?"

"Well—no, and I was just—"

"Ask the chief of police."

"This woman, if she could manage to recover, or even speak," said that officer, "would do us a great service, for she could put us on the track of a man whom we've been struggling after for nearly two months."

"What!" cried Voiville, "can it be—?"

"Loyal-Francœur! yes, sir, exactly."

"Then, it was he who—?"

"Who murdered his mistress, his accomplice, the woman Broussel, midwife and somnambulist, of the Rue Taille-Pain; an old acquaintance of mine, whom I often wished to get out of the way, but who was protected by powerful influence. She's in a bad way now, poor woman."

"And Loyal-Francœur has escaped you again?"

"As usual."

"Then it's another fruitless errand?"

"No," said M. Manuel, rubbing his hands; "no, for I had the satisfaction to-night of taking home to the Rue Bellechasse Mademoiselle Jeanne de Rieumes, found at last, and found by us."

"Mademoiselle de Rieumes found!" cried Voiville. "Impossible!"

"The law may be slow, but it always attains its ends," said the commissary sententiously. "If you like to come with us to the colonel's, where we were going when you came in, you can satisfy yourself as to the truth of what I say."

## LIX.

### HOME AGAIN.

EVERYONE had met together in Jeanne's bedroom, a young maiden's bedroom, simply hung with white muslin. At the bedside were Louise, Madame Borin, and Paul, who had been hastily informed of the good news; Colonel de Rieumes was sitting in an armchair, where he had passed the night, in defiance of the doctors' strict injunctions, they having ordered him to rest; lastly, M. Pringy and Victor were there, standing a little apart from the others. The humpback, tired out by his two restless nights, had gone home to sleep. By one of those phenomena which doctors can neither foresee nor explain, the narcotic which the mountebank Alcindor had given Jeanne in order to make her sleep and to enable them to move her more easily to the Avenue de Clichy, this narcotic, by producing a calm and beneficent slumber, had almost brought about her recovery. On rousing in her bed-room, at her father's side, she had imagined that she was awaking from some fearful dream. And when Paul, beside himself with joy, arrived, she had smilingly held out her hand to him, as if she had only taken leave of him the day before. Then things had gradually come back to her; she remembered leaving the house and being carried off, her imprisonment in the little house in the middle of the wood, and the young man who had spoken to her in such a gentle and respectful voice. She recognised the young man, hiding behind the other persons present. She made a sign to him with her hand.

"Was it you, sir, who brought me back here?" she asked.

Victor hung his head sadly. Before he could reply Jeanne uttered a loud cry.

"Ah!" she murmured, "no, I remember, the flight—alone, alone—lost among those great gloomy streets. I fainted—but after that, what happened afterwards?"

"You were taken care of by some honest people who nursed you like their own daughter and who, after your recovery, brought you back to your father," said Clairac, who did not wish his darling to torture her mind by vain seekings, nor to fatigue her too much by the complicated history of the adventures which she had gone through.

"My recovery?" said Jeanne. "Have I been ill, then?"

"Yes, for a few days. But that's over, quite over. The doctor has no fear now," said Louise, arranging the pillow which the patient, in moving, had pushed on one side.

"And—the people who nursed me, it was you, no doubt, you and your mother, whom I see at my bedside?"

Louise was about to reply in the negative, but the colonel made a sign to her, and she said in a whisper, and as if ashamed of the falsehood:

"Yes."

"Then kiss me, my sister, and you, too, my second mother. Paul and my father ought to love you well."

Louise took her in her arms and kissed her tenderly. It was a charming picture, these two girls' faces, one overflowing with health, the other still pale, but both breathing happiness and mingling their charms in a sisterly embrace.

"One would say they were two sisters?" whispered Pringy to Victor, whose eyes were overflowing with tears.

"Alas!" replied the latter with a sigh. "But what a distance separates them."

"Less, perhaps, than you think," insinuated the count.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I must keep silence at present. We'll talk of it again, later.

"Now, my darling, you must keep quiet," said the colonel, getting up from his chair and taking his daughter's hand. "The doctor has forbidden you to talk too much."

"Very well, father, but on one condition—that my little sister shall not leave me."

The colonel looked inquiringly at Louise. The young girl took a chair and sat down at Jeanne's bedside.

"Nearer, nearer still," said the latter, in an affectionate voice.

And, taking Louise's head between her hands, she asked:

"What is your name?"

"Louise."

"Well, Louise, you will be my sister, always, always, won't you?"

"Always. But you must be good and do as the doctor orders."

"Kiss me again, Louise. I'll do whatever you tell me. And when I'm married, you'll still stay. Paul will let you, won't you, dear?" she asked, holding out her thin, transparent hand to the young man.

As his sole answer, the latter took the hand and covered it with kisses.

"Upon my word, I have no remorse now," growled Pringy, coughing, to hide his emotion, "this fellow has not paid too dearly for his happiness, after all. I'll make my proposal, too, and quickly."

"What do you mean?" asked Victor again, puzzled by his companion's half-confidences and asides.

"That for the last two days I've had a most whimsical idea in my head, an idea that never occurred to me before, or, if it did, I dismissed it as folly."

"And what is the idea?"



"I want to get married. It's silly, it's mad, but so it is."

"And what is there to prevent you?"

"Many things. In the first place I haven't the least notion whether the person I'm thinking of would have me."

"You have only to ask her," said Victor, more and more astonished at these confidences, especially at such a time and such a place.

"I daren't."

"Well, she has no doubt got friends."

"Yes. But that's worse still. And, look here, Victor, you might be of assistance to me."

"I?"

"You. Because you might give me some good advice. You know, straightforwardly, no mincing words, as to an old soldier that there's no beating about the bush with."

"I don't know the lady."

"H'm!—yes. You do know her. Listen to me," said Pringy, who was getting rather mixed in his explanations. "You must know that, yesterday, when the colonel came back home—"

"The chief of police and M. Manuel, commissary of police, are inquiring whether they can see M. de Rieumes," interrupted a servant.

Pringy breathed freely again. It seemed as if this announcement, by cutting short his confidences, had lifted a weight from his mind.

"Show them into the drawing-room. I'll go there with these gentlemen," said the colonel.

The footman bowed and withdrew.

"What's in the wind? Have they arrested Loyal-Francœur at last?" said Pringy, coming forward.

"We shall see," said the colonel. "Come along, gentlemen. Jeanne needs rest, and it is time we left her. Good-bye, my darling," he added, imprinting a kiss on his daughter's face.

"Good-bye, father. But Louise may stop with me, may she not?"

"Certainly. Now Paul, give her a kiss, I give you permission."

Paul kissed Jeanne's hand once more and got up and followed the other men.

"Well, about this service that I can do you?" asked Victor of Pringy, when they were in the corridor.

"Oh, it's too long a story," said the count. "I'll tell you another time."

The chief of police, M. Manuel, and Gratien Voiville were sitting talking in the drawing-room. They rose on seeing the colonel and his friend enter.

"I was expecting your visit, gentlemen," said the colonel, bowing to them. "Well, was your last night's pursuit successful?"

"Yes, and no, colonel," said the chief of police. "Something unexpected happened to us, and for that reason I am anxious to interrogate you. Oh, quite privately, at present," he continued, noticing the movement that the word had caused the colonel to make. "Let us try and avoid a misunderstanding, sir. You are angry with me for having left you abruptly in order to go in pursuit of your daughter's abductor. As far as you were concerned, she was restored, it was all over; but you must understand that it was impossible for me to look at things in the same light?"

"Certainly," began the colonel, rather embarrassed.

"To you, sir, had happened a joyful event which made you forget all past troubles, and you forgave the criminal. To me, sir, a magistrate, the impassable and inflexible representative of the law, this course is forbidden. It is my duty to pursue the criminal, notwithstanding, and in the face of, all opposition, and bring him within the power of the court which will judge him. Such is my duty, and such are my orders, and you, an old officer in the French army, know that a man must never argue with his duty nor with his orders. If I hesitated for a single instant, I should be unworthy of the uniform which I wear and the cross of honour which I carry on my breast."

"Quite true, sir, and, far from bearing you any ill-will on that account, I congratulate you on it," said the colonel, carried away in spite of himself by the officer's sincere warmth. "But, this misunderstanding explained, tell me now what questions you propose to put to me, and also what occurred in last night's chase."

"Let us take things in their order. When you went into the office in the Avenue de Clichy, where your daughter was restored to you, did you see a woman?"

"Did I see her? Why, she took me there."

"Ah! and what was she like?"

"As far as I could see—for I was much upset, and very little disposed to look at people's appearance—as far as I could see, she was fat, red-faced, about forty years old—more, perhaps. Yes, five-and-forty."

"That's it. Then we were on the right track. That was the wretched woman who was sacrificed."

"Sacrificed! Who?"

"Madame Honoré Broussel, the midwife, Loyal-Francœur's accomplice, whom we picked up last night on the Boulevard Bessières, dying, stabbed in the breast by a dagger."

"By a dagger, and by whom?"

"Why, by her accomplices, to whom she was a burthen, and who killed her dog, too, for fear, no doubt, that he would put us on their track again."

"I remember the dog as well," said the colonel. "He was lying under my daughter's bed, and would not move."

"Consequently, doubt is no longer possible; it was Loyal-Francœur and his accomplice that we missed by a minute last night at the Clichy Gate. You see, Monsieur de Pringy, you who were indignant at seeing me thinking of my warrants in the midst of your family scene."

"I don't know what has been the matter with me for some time past," said Pringy; "but everything that I undertake, everything that I do, that I say, turns out badly for me. And that just at the moment when an idea has occurred to me which may change the whole course of my existence. Accordingly, I hesitate to express it, and yet—"

"In one word," said the colonel, "the rascals escaped you again?"

"By a second, and leaving in their track a pool of blood to stop us. But we've not done with them yet, unless—"

The chief of police stopped abruptly, and a livid pallor overspread his face.

"What is the matter?" asked Colonel de Rieumes and M. Manuel together, "are you ill?"

"No," said he, collecting himself, "it was an idea, a terrible idea, which crossed my mind. Yesterday, as you know, I had three of my men with

me, among whom was Fauvette, the most eager, courageous, and devoted man in the service. Now, whilst we were attending to the wounded mid-wife, Fauvette suddenly disappeared. Where did he go? There is no doubt in my mind, he went on the fugitives' track. And just as I was thinking of that, and waiting till he came back, in order to be enlightened, the idea struck me that he may have been drawn into a trap and murdered as well. It was rather too much for me. But no, Fauvette is intelligent and clever. I have hopes."

"Is that all you want with me, sir?" asked M. de Rieumes after a moment's painful silence.

"At present, yes; for being satisfied that I've been dealing with the same scoundrel again, I shall continue to take my measures on the same basis. So I will go, only begging you, as soon as Mademoiselle de Rieumes is better, as soon as she is in a condition to talk without fatiguing herself, and, lastly, as soon as the recollection of what has passed is no longer a source of danger to her, begging you, I say, to let me know."

"At present," said Pringy, "her mind is feeble, and any questions would be out of place."

"I know it, and therefore I do not insist. M. Manuel, you have nothing to say to these gentlemen? M. Voiville, you have sufficient information? Good day, then, colonel. As for you, gentlemen," he added, turning to Victor and Pringy, "will you be good enough to come to my office? Things are drawing to a conclusion, for I believe that in eight and forty hours from now we shall have captured Loyal-Francœur at last."

"Upon what do you found that hope?" whispered M. Manuel as they went out.

"I don't know. *I feel it.*"

## LX.

### WHAT FAUVETTE WAS ABOUT.

STILL accompanied by M. Manuel and Voiville, and followed by Pringy and Victor, the chief of police returned to the prefecture. The rag-picker, Prosper Martin, who had come to give his evidence as to the events of the night before, was waiting in the ante-room.

"Has Fauvette come in?" inquired the chief of police of his secretary, placing his hat on the chimney-piece.

"Not yet, sir."

"No news of him?"

"None."

"It's inconceivable--and alarming. Well, we'll wait a little longer. Give me this morning's report."

"Here it is, sir," said the secretary, handing his superior a packet of papers.

"Now then, sit down, gentlemen. I won't keep you a minute; you are as much interested in this as I am."

He glanced anxiously through the papers, and threw aside one after the other five or six reports which treated of other matters. At last his eyes sparkled; he had discovered something.

"La Villette report," said he: "At eight o'clock a boatman came to the station and stated that he had seen a horse and trap in the canal at the top of the Rue de Crimée. The fireman from the Château-Laudon, having been

summoned by telegraph, came and dragged out the horse, which was drowned, and the broken waggon. This waggon is one of those moving houses which serve as dwellings for mountebanks. It contained a bed, divers household utensils, weights and ropes such as were used by strong men, and the whole paraphernalia of a travelling dentist. The door-plate bears the following inscription: Pierre Boudillon, otherwise Alcindor, dentist, Paris (Seine). The driver of the waggon has not been found. It is supposed that he has been drowned. A search is being made."

"That's the waggon I saw them with," said the rag-picker; "a mountebank's 'in-and-out.'"

"And in which they escaped," added the chief of police.

"Can they have been drowned, then, in their flight?"

"No, don't hope that. It's a new trick of that cunning rogue. He made us believe in his flight; he wants now to persuade us that he is dead. The one won't go down with me any more than the other."

"Then, where can he be?"

"How can I tell. There are a thousand hiding-places in Paris. We might have all the lodging-houses and dens searched, and then not discover anything. Chance is sometimes the cleverest of detectives. But cunning against cunning. M. Voiville, I think you know enough about this affair now. Write any sort of account you please; but pretend to believe that both the murderers have been drowned. That will embolden them, perhaps, to expose themselves sooner. Now, gentlemen, your depositions. I have a thousand things to attend to, and I want to make haste and get through the formalities connected with this case first."

Voiville withdrew, and the chief of police called his secretary to draw up the report of the night's events.

In their refuge in the quarries Loyal-Francœur and Alcindor Boudillon, tired to death, benumbed with cold, and knocked up by their sleepless night, continued to feign sleep whilst watching one another's every movement. At last the inquiry agent could bear it no longer. He got up to stretch his cramped legs. His companion followed his example.

"Are we going to stop here long?" asked Loyal-Francœur.

"Hang it! we can hardly show our faces on the Boulevard des Italiens just at present. There's pretty good reason for thinking that our walk would soon be interrupted. So I think that if we want to go out, we had better wait at least till it's dark."

"It's enough to freeze anyone here."

"Yes; it's not so comfortable as your Rue des Chantres office. It's all your fault, though; why did you go in for a job beyond your powers?"

"Alas!" sighed Loyal-Francœur, shivering.

"So the best plan is, as the wise man said, to bear one's misfortunes patiently and wait. And, besides, you wanted to stop in Paris."

"Yes; and, to tell the truth, I almost repent it. I should have done better to fly," said Loyal-Francœur, half cowed by the darkness, fatigue, and silence.

"Pooh! It'll never do to throw the helve after the hatchet. You told me you had a splendid affair on hand. Think about it; it'll make the time appear shorter."

"I'm getting hungry, too," said the inquiry agent, "and if we have to wait seven or eight hours more—"

"Hungry? Well, we'll have breakfast."

"Breakfast on what?"

"Ha, ha! old fellow. That shows up the man used to luxury. You had counted on escaping by the railway to-night; and, *blasé* that you are, you said to yourself that there are refreshment-rooms along the line. I who am a poor outcast—I never think of refreshment-rooms. I do like the third-class travellers, I carry my provisions with me."

"Provisions!" cried Loyal-Francœur, whose eyes sparkled.

"Rather. Look here."

Opening his bag, the mountebank took from it a two-pound loaf, a sausage, and a bottle of wine, which he showed to his wondering companion.

"Not to mention a nip of cognac," he said, pointing to a flask hanging at his side. "Come on, as you feel like it, let's break a crust together. I haven't got any napkin to offer you, but you must take the will for the deed. Only be careful; that's all there is for to-day."

"Come on, quick," said Loyal-Francœur, taking a piece of bread, which he began to devour.

"Eat away, old fellow, eat away," said the mountebank, cutting away at his sausage. "As an old song said, that I used to sing when I was a youngster:

'Eat well to-day, for it may come  
That neither you nor I shall eat to-morrow.'

"Be quiet!" cried Loyal-Francœur, ceasing from eating and turning quite pale, "be quiet. The song's like a fatal prediction."

"Bosh! you don't mean to say you're superstitious now? *Sapristi!* a man who was a fortune-teller's lover. Well, we know all about it now. Somnambulist as she was, she didn't find out what was going to happen to her to-night."

"Be quiet, I tell you; it's that, perhaps, that gives me the blues. The poor woman loved me, and I loved her too; there, really, I did love her."

"Well, you were rather rough with her, that's all," said Alcindor with his mouth full.

"Don't make a joke of it. It was a necessity for both of us. But I'd give—there, I'd give half of what we made to-night, that it shouldn't have happened!"

"What's done's done," said the mountebank philosophically. "There's no occasion for being down in the mouth. Have a drink, old chap, and let's talk about this fresh business."

"Yes. I told you, didn't I, that there was another job for us to-night? Well, this it it."

"Let me fill a pipe; I shall understand you better."

"You remember the first stroke of business I got you to do?"

"The man who had nothing but card-counters in his pocket? Yes; well?"

"That man was in the way of a very rich woman, 'the princess,' as they called her. She was madly in love with another man, and Pedrillo—that was our man's name—knew some terrible things about her, by which he could have got money out of her."

"We put Pedrillo out of the way all right, I know that. So the princess felt comfortable."

"No, not at all. The man that she was in love with, a young artist called Clairac, was going to marry a girl—

"That we seized and took off to Nogent. I know that again, as it was her that we captured again after her escape and gave back to her father yesterday. Go on."

"I managed to find out a plan to get a 'mug' accused of the whole business. The artist fought a duel, and the princess got hold of him. So far all had gone well. But I alone was not satisfied. I didn't think I had been well enough paid for my trouble."

"The man's insatiable," said Alcindor, puffing out a cloud of smoke.

"In addition to that, I had Pedrillo's pocket-book — a pocket-book crammed with papers, damaging letters, police reports, and even notes of terms of imprisonment undergone by the celebrated 'princess.' I determined to make use of them."

"That's plain enough."

"So I went to her. But, proud as a Spaniard, she told me that she'd paid me, and wanted to put me out of the house. I shouted, and she too; the artist arrived, there was a row, and I had the misfortune to put a bullet into her that killed her on the spot."

"Like last night's knife business."

"Don't keep reminding me of that. I escaped and came to you. You know the rest. But since that the princess's house has been shut up. The seals have been affixed and everything guarded. Now, there are untold riches there—gold, notes, jewels, and rare objects; treasure, old fellow—treasure that we can share between us."

"Treasure!" repeated the mountebank, his face lighted up with greed.

"Treasure! And when shall we go there?"

"This very night."

"To-night. Bravo!"

At that moment a slight sound, like something falling in the distance, broke the silence of the gallery. Loyal-Franceœur started.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, terrified.

The mountebank, snatching up the lantern, had dashed in the direction from which the sound proceeded. But he had to stop after taking a few steps; one of those slimy ponds of which we have spoken stood there, broad and impassable, and blocking the whole gallery. He listened. The sound had ceased.

"It's nothing," he said, picking up his pipe, which had fallen on the ground. "Some collapse in the quarry; that often happens."

"If anyone had heard us—"

"Impossible; there's a barrier. No one could get near us. And even if some poor devil had heard us, you didn't name the house, did you?"

Lying flat on his stomach, crawling along the layer of gravel and plaster which formed the flooring, Fauvette glided out of the gallery. He dragged himself along thus for nearly half an hour, making his way like a snail as far as the spot where the miners were at work. Once there, he stood up, passed them boldly, and rushed out, ran to the nearest cab-rank, and opened the door of the first cab. The driver made a grimace at the sight of this soiled and plastered individual; but a ten-franc piece which Fauvette exhibited checked any disposition to object.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

"Thirty-six, Quai des Orfèvres."

"Right," said the driver, winking. "Pull up, my lass!"

## LXI.

## A TRAP.

"WHICH, having been read over to him, the undermentioned signed with us," said the chief of police, concluding his examination.

"Thanks, gentlemen. My colleague M. Manuel and I are going to the magistrate to inform him of what has occurred. Kindly give my respects to M. and Mademoiselle de Rieumes." Victor and Pringy rose. Prosper Martin took up his cap which he had placed on a chair, and they all went out.

As the two magistrates were about to take leave of the witnesses at the staircase, in order to go along the corridor which leads to the Palais de Justice, a man with his clothes disordered and covered with white dust rushed like a thunderbolt into the middle of the group.

"Fauvette!" cried the chief of police, recognising him.

"And in what a state!" said M. Manuel. "Where the deuce have you been?"

"Where have I been? In the quarries, where I followed my man. It's a certainty this time, sir; to-night they're ours!"

"What? are you certain? Then we'll be off at once."

"It's needless. I know where to find them. Only listen to me for a minute."

"Wait a moment," said his chief. "Come back to my room, gentlemen; we can't talk out here in the passage. Fauvette will tell us his story."

They went back. Fauvette sat down.

"If it's all the same to you, sir, I'll ask leave to eat, and, above all, to drink something. Ever since yesterday I've been on my legs, with an empty stomach, and I'm literally faint with hunger. I can talk just the same, and better."

The remains of the detectives' breakfasts were in their room. They were brought to Fauvette, who began to eat like a famished creature.

"Well," said he, "when you stopped to see to the wounded woman and I saw the murderers escaping I couldn't bear it any longer and went after them. It was bad business, they were going faster than me, and if they had taken any turning, I must have lost sight of them. But they went straight on, as if they intended to go right round Paris. So I had only to do the same. All the same, they had a long start, and I had had enough of it, I had a stitch in my side. But just as I was beginning to despair, I saw a black object in the distance which seemed to me like their trap. I made an effort and got a little nearer. I could see it quite plainly. It was them. The sight gave me strength and I began to run again. But I saw them alter their direction and go down the Rue de Crimée; then, suddenly, close to the hedge, crash! horse and trap in the canal. As for the two men, they had gone over the bridge and were walking along the other side. If I could have found a policeman, the thing would have been plain sailing; but for me alone it was folly to think of it. Good intentions are no use, a man can't capture two fellows like they are. So I contented myself with following them. I watched them go round the Buttes Chaumont and slip through a hole into the quarries. I didn't hesitate. After giving them time to get on a little, I slipped in as well. What a night! I was

freezing. My two men slept like the just, but I shivered in silence. This morning they began to have breakfast, but I, who was dying of hunger and had cramp in my legs, daren't move, for fear of being discovered. At last, after having a drink, they began to chatter, and I heard all about their future plans. To-night, at ten o'clock, they're going to pillage Madame Dolores Wilson's house in the Avenue Montaigne."

"To-night! are you certain, Fauvette?" said the chief of police.

"Sure and certain—If you like we can catch them like rats in a hole."

"If I like!—I should think I did like. Quick, let's take our measures. But they won't get the start of us?"

"They won't come out till dark."

"Then we have plenty of time. You're not too tired?"

"Tired!" said the detective in astonishment. "I was, just now. It's all over now. Ready to start on another night of it, if necessary."

"We'll go with you," said Victor and Pringy.

"I don't much like it, but I suppose I must consent."

"Thanks."

"Fauvette, go and fetch Antheaume and come back to us. Now, gentlemen, to the Avenue Montaigne."

Nine o'clock was striking. Walking cautiously, Loyal-Francœur and Alcindor glided out of the quarries. Keeping close to the walls and exploring each street, they went silently along. The Avenue Montaigne was deserted. At rare intervals a foot-passenger walked quickly along. The house that Dolores had lived in was without light and shut up.

"How shall we get in?" asked the mountebank.

"Let's go round to the garden," replied the inquiry agent. "You should know how to climb a wall?"

"What a question!"

"Then give me a lift."

Boudillon took his accomplice by the waist and lifted him up as if he had been a child. Loyal-Francœur, making use of his hands and feet, got over the wall and let himself down on the other side.

"Come along," he said, in a low voice.

Alcindor had not boasted; with one spring he reached the top of the wall, with another he was at Loyal-Francœur's side.

"And now?" said he.

"Wait."

Taking from his pocket a bunch of instruments like those that we saw in the hump-back's possession, he noiselessly opened the back door of the conservatory. Once there, groping his way along, he went and forced the lock of the door of communication. Then he made the mountebank go in with him and shut this door behind him.

"Have you the lantern?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Light it, we're at home now."

Alcindor lit the lantern. They went upstairs. Another door yielded like the first two. They were in the drawing-room.

"At last!" said the mountebank, with a sigh of relief.

"You see I've kept my word. Now we must find the swag."

"It's a fine place, this," said Alcindor, casting an amazed look around him.



"Fine, yes, but we haven't come here to admire. Let's look for the strong-box. If I'm not mistaken, it should be in the bedroom."

"Let's go and look."

They went out into the corridor and entered the bedroom where we saw Paul being nursed by his mistress. Loyal-Francœur walked first with his tools. Alcindor followed him, carrying the lantern. The door was not locked. The inquiry agent opened it and then sprang back. The ray of light which Alcindor's lantern had thrown in front of him had shown him the outlines of two men standing in the middle of the room.

"What's the matter?" said the mountebank, who had seen nothing.

Loyal-Francœur had not time to reply. The door of the drawing-room had opened again behind them and two men advanced to capture them. Dashing the lantern on the ground, the mountebank ground it under his foot, and taking advantage of the respite which this sudden transition from light to the densest darkness gave him, he rushed at hazard at another door, which gave way beneath the shock, with a sound of broken woodwork and glass. Behind this door, on the grand staircase, he saw two more men. He turned quickly. But the circle had drawn close. On one side was the chief of police, with the count; on the other, Antheaume and M. Manuel; on a third, Victor and Fauvette. And, at the far end of the drawing-room, Prosper Martin, acting on his own account, arrived upon the scene, carrying a candelabrum with three candles to throw a light on the scene. The two scoundrels, foaming with rage, drew their knives, resolving at least to sell their liberty dearly. For a moment the assailants hesitated. Then, more impatient than the others, Victor rushed forward and seized Loyal-Francœur by the throat. The latter's knife descended, leaving a deep gash in the young man's face, who fell covered with blood.

"Avenged at last!" cried the murderer.

He was about to repeat the blow, but Fauvette seized his arm, whilst the chief of police pinned him from behind. During this time the mountebank, fighting like a mad bull, was struggling with Prosper Martin, Pringy, Antheaume and M. Manuel, who had fastened upon him. Fortunately Antheaume succeeded in getting a cord round him; in the twinkling of an eye the giant was bound and powerless. Seeing which, Loyal-Francœur, ceasing all resistance, said to those who held him:

"Don't hurt me, I surrender."

They tied his hands and left him in charge of the detectives. Victor, who had fallen to the ground, seemed to be lifeless. The Comte de Pringy, bending anxiously over him, was feeling for the beating of his heart. The touch of his hand made the young man recover from his swoon. Wiping away the blood which bathed his face, he smiled faintly.

"It's nothing," he murmured; "only a scratch. May the blood which flows from it be a new baptism and wash away my past sins."

"M. de Pringy," said the chief of police, "I leave him to you; Prosper Martin will help you to carry him to Colonel de Rieumes, where I'll send presently to inquire after him. I must take my prisoners to some safe place. We've had trouble enough to secure them."

"That's right, everyone to his task," said Pringy. "Come along, Martin; help me to carry Victor."

He bent over the wounded man again. But the latter, raising himself of his own accord, said in a beseeching voice:

"No, not there, for my mother and sister's sakes;—take me where you

like, to an hotel, a hospital, or nowhere at all. There's nothing the matter with me, it's only a scratch, I tell you."

"Ah!" yelled Loyal-Francœur with rage, "I've missed him after all."

"Come along, you," said Fauvette, taking him by the arm. "As for the other one, we must carry him to the cab. He'd lead us some fresh dance if we untied him."

Leaving Victor who, in fact, was standing up and not appearing to be in need of any assistance, the rag-picker helped Antheaume and M. Manuel to carry Alcindor to a cab, in which they placed him. During this time Fauvette and the chief of police, each holding one of Loyal-Francœur's arms, led him down and took their places beside him in a second cab.

"To the Préfecture," said the chief to the drivers.

Alone with Victor, the count bathed his wound which, in fact, had only penetrated the skin and was of no depth. It was hastily bandaged and, leaning on Pringy's arm, Victor was able to go down the stairs with a firm step.

"You see," said the young man, "it's nothing. Now that our task is over, that Mademoiselle de Riermes and M. Clairac are happy, Loyal-Francœur is in the hands of the law, and my sin is at last repaired, may I ask, of the colonel and of you, a favour?"

"What is it?"

"Obtain leave for me to enlist, get me accepted as a soldier in one of the Tonkin regiments, under the flag of France. There I shall rehabilitate myself in your eyes and my own, and, during my absence, take care of my old mother and my sister."

"Bravo, old fellow, but, since you speak to me like this, I, too, will ask you a thing which would conciliate all, if it were possible."

"What is it?"

"The secret which, on two occasions, did not manage to pass my lips."

"Well?"

"Do you think that your sister would accept me as her husband?"

## LXII.

### LOYAL-FRANCOEUR'S LAST TRICK.

THE two cabs conveying the prisoners drove off in the direction of the Préfecture. In the first one Antheaume and M. Manuel were guarding Alcindor, who was tightly bound. In the other Fauvette and the chief of police were doing the same for Loyal-Francœur, whose hands only were secured. In order to avoid any curiosity on the part of the public, the blinds were pulled down. The inside was completely dark. From the Champs-Élysées to the Préfecture, there is a direct way by the Rue de Rivoli and the Place du Châtelet. But the Rue de Rivoli being under repair, and encumbered with heaps of stones and ruts, the cabs turned along by the Carrousel, in order to gain the quays. The road is very uneven in the Place du Carrousel. Under the influence of the jolts Loyal-Francœur convulsively moved his hands which were tied crosswise across his chest. When they arrived at the macadamised roadway of the quays, he gave a sigh of relief. His captors did not attach the least importance to it; but this sigh, no less than the movement caused by the jolting, had a great importance of its own. After the fashion of old criminals Loyal-Francœur

had, suspended to his neck by a strong cord, a knife, a simple clasp-knife, concealed under his coat. By a miracle of patience, and by the aid only of two fingers, which were at liberty, he had succeeded in opening his knife. And when the jolting of the cab had seemed to cause such a disagreeable motion he had rubbed the cords against the open blade, thus gradually sawing through his bonds. The sigh of satisfaction announced that he had at last succeeded. But he took good care not to move. Far from it. He clasped his hands more tightly than ever on his chest, in this way concealing the ends of cord, which might have hung or fallen down. They arrived at the Quai de l' Horloge. The two cabs entered the archway. Alcindor, still bound, was taken out first. Then came Loyal-Francœur's turn. Groping his way, he pretended to miss the step. Fauvette loosed his arm for a second. Suddenly shooting out his arms like two catapults, he dashed his captors aside, and, rushing along the quay, climbed upon the parapet. Fauvette, picking himself up, sprung after him, to seize him. Nothing was left in his hand but a fragment of cloth; Loyal-Francœur had leapt into the Seine. Full of courage, the detective climbed the parapet in his turn and dived in the direction where his prisoner had disappeared. Antheaume, coming up behind him, did the same. Leaving Alcindor Boudillon in the hands of the Dépôt warders, the chief of police, M. Manuel and two or three others, rushed to the spot with lights. Below the quay, in the black waters, the three men were swimming, one trying to gain the opposite bank, the other two pursuing him. In the streams of light thrown out by the gas lamps, a head was all at once seen to appear, two hands beat the water, then all disappeared in the gloom, only to appear again a few yards further on. Loyal-Francœur was a vigorous swimmer. Having been maturing his plan for the last hour, he was in possession of all his presence of mind. Husbanding his strength, he dodged his foes, misleading them by numerous twists and turns, and by diving when they were close upon him, without apparently distressing himself. They, on the contrary, being obliged to regulate their movements by his, and not daring to put forth all their strength and speed, began to tire. Several detectives who had come out of their quarters were launching boats to assist in this exciting man-hunt. Loyal-Francœur felt himself lost. Just as Fauvette was about to overtake him, he let himself sink, and seized the detective's leg.

"Help, Chocolat!" cried Fauvette, who disappeared, dragged under by his assailant.

With two powerful strokes Antheaume was at the place where the two had last appeared. There was only an eddy, which the swift current was already sweeping away. The detectives who manned the boats bent to their oars. Several of them were taking off their clothes in order to dive in their turn, when a head emerged, that of Fauvette. They hurried to him to take him into the boat. He was literally exhausted.

"Where is he?" asked the detectives.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"He should be at the bottom," he replied. "Ah the scoundrel! he had clutched me and was dragging me after him. I hoped for a moment to be able to hold him until help came, and then we should both have been fished out. But it was no go, I was choking. I thought of an old trick that a friend of mine, a sailor, once taught me; I drew up the other leg, and let him have it on the head; he let go at once. I should have liked to have tried it again, but I was too done. You must have a try and get him."

They searched the river in vain. Nowhere was Loyal-Francœur to be seen. Two or three detectives had the courage to dive, in spite of the cold and darkness. But they found nothing. The Seine kept its prey.

"Come," said Fauvette, shivering, "I've had enough of this."

They fished out Antheaume, whose teeth were chattering, and all went back to their quarters to warm themselves. The chief of police and M. Manuel were drawing up the report.

"He was an artful dog," said Fauvette to his comrades, after having related to them the evening's adventures. "But his last trick didn't come off."

### LXIII.

#### EPILOGUE.

ONE month after the circumstances that we have just related, an eager and sympathetic crowd was collected in the Church of Sainte-Clotilde, where a double marriage was to take place. At last, Paul Clairac led to the altar Jeanne de Rieumes, who was quite well again, although rather pale, and the Comte de Pringy, beaming with joy, was marrying Louise, who, as much from sympathy as from love, had, on her brother's first words to her, said that she would gladly consent. The two young brides were dressed exactly alike in white satin, with long trains and bodices of white silk fitting close to the figure, with large tulle veils completely covering them. One would have thought that they were two sisters. Among the spectators, in the midst of the cream of society, artistic and military, which had hurried thither on the invitation of the Count and Clairac, were several of our own acquaintances. First there was the chief of police, whom Pringy had insisted on having as best man. Then came Victor, in the uniform of the Marine Infantry, and only waiting for the celebration of the double marriage to go and join, as he had requested, the Tonkin expeditionary force. The long scar, hardly yet healed over, which Loyal-Francœur's knife had made, attracted the attention of all, and harmonised well with his simple uniform. Next was Isidore, the humpback, superbly decked out. He had been in despair, poor fellow, at not having been present at the final scene. He would have prevented Loyal-Francœur's escape! he knew all his old master's dodges. Then he had related what the others had done, and had added to that the part that he would have played if he had been there. It ended by his being thoroughly persuaded that the capture was entirely due to him. This capture was reduced to that of the person of Alcindor Boudillon, the mountebank; for Madame Honoré Broussel had died in the hospital. Considered only as an accomplice, Alcindor was about to make his appearance at the assizes, with New Caledonia in prospect. The humpback paraded himself therefore as an important personage. He was supremely happy, moreover, for the colonel, who had given his arm to good Madame Borin, whom he called his "chum," had announced to him that he would attach him to his person, as a student of painting, commonly known as a dauber. The fact was, the colonel, to whom joy and tranquillity were restored, had taken up again his two favourite hobbies, oil-painting and gardening. As regards gardening, he had infected Madame Borin, who, never having had any flowers but in her windows, went into ecstasies over Monsieur de Rieumes' borders and his

hot-houses on the new system. As for painting, he had initiated Isidore, who, as a humpback, had all at once felt a mad passion for the straight trees and branches which the colonel perpetrated.

The lower ranks were represented by the rag-picker, Prosper Martin, who had on his arm "Mother Comfort," in a more striking costume than ever, and was chatting with Victoire, otherwise Madame Derosse, the Charly nurse, who carried in her arms the poor little unknown baby who had been entrusted to her to play the part of Jeanne's child. The colonel had declared his intention of adopting this child and taking charge of him until his majority. When one is happy he should think of those who suffer. In the midst of all, Voiville, notebook in hand, taking notes, half guest, half journalist, certain, in any case, of cutting out all his comrades by the sureness of his information, was fluttering about from one to another and seeming to be in half-a-dozen places at one time. Lastly, modestly seated side by side, the two detectives, Fauvette and Antheaume, were talking over the whole affair. They reminded one another of Pringy's arrest, his being confronted at the Morgue with Pedrillo's body, and said to themselves that they would attend his wedding. Whilst admitting that it was very curious, the honest "Chocolat" remarked that "all's well that ends well," but Fauvette sighed.

"No, old fellow," he said to his comrade, "this isn't what should have been. I ought to have let myself sink with my prisoner. They would perhaps have fished us out both dead, but it would never at least have been said that Fauvette let his man go. I was faint-hearted that day; I must confess it. A detective should never think of his life; he should think of nothing but his duty."

"That's true," replied Antheaume.

THE END.

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